Edgar P. Jacobs

S.O.S. METEORS

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

E.P. JACOBS

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MORTIMER IN PARIS

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Cold wave over Europe

Heavy damage to crops in France, Great Britain and Italy

London, May 6 (AFP)
A series of snowstorms
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THE H BOMB
Is it responsible for the bad weather?

Professor Frederic Soddy, who
received the Nobel Prize for hi
discovery of isot
radioactiv
t be

some areas, the layer
and reached 12 inches
ll the phone lines hav
amaged.
Denmark, thousands
saw the storm devast
their crops and every
sowed again.

Catastrophic situation in the edmont Aosta Valley

Coal industry encountering problems caused by cold

Luxemburg

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is

The whole Southeast of victim of torrential rains

Violent storms over France

Waters rose and flooded over half

FOR SEVERAL LONG MONTHS, METEOROLOGICAL PHENOMENA OF ALARMING SEVERITY HAVE BEEN PLAGUING WESTERN EUROPE AND WREAKING HAVOC ON THE LIVES OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE... AFTER A LONG AND DEADLY WINTER, TEMPERATURES ARE FINALLY RISING... ALAS! THE THAWING OF THE SNOW IS ACCOMPANIED BY TORRENTIAL RAINS, BRINGING A FRESH CALAMITY: FLOODING! AND THE WATERS RISE, RISE INEXORABLY!

Flooding throughout France

of Val-d'Isère, doing considerable

Sunspots are causing the bad weather

least what the meteo-
are claiming
ological. Sinc

Snowstorm over the Balearic Islands

Madrid, February 22 (AFP)
The third cold wave
in Spain took the sha
snowstorms that especially
affected the provinces of
central and east
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Violent demonstration by unemployed people in Foggia

Risks of flooding in Germany

Snow and the risk of flooding are still threatening Western Germany. The Rhine, blocked

gia, February 20 (AFP)
were engaged Monday
oximately 3,000 unemp
ost of them women
med with knives, steel
d stones, tried to
storm the city hall
olice forces o

AT THE TIME THIS STORY BEGINS, A VIOLENT STORM IS SWEEPING OVER PARIS, DISRUPTING TRAFFIC...

SKILFULLY THREADING ITS WAY THROUGH THE CHAOTIC FLOW OF VEHICLES, A TAXI IS HEADING TOWARDS LA MADELEINE...

... AND IN THIS TAXI WE FIND OUR OLD FRIEND, PROFESSOR PHILIP MORTIMER.

Say, driver, it looks like things aren't going too well in Paris these days?

For sure, guv'! What with this ruddy weather that just won't stop!

Me, I'm pretty darn sure that it was their stupid H bomb that made the seasons go all funny... It's like all those artificial things they're sending up in the sky! You'll see, guv', those whatsits will bring down loads of trouble! And...

SUDDENLY A LIGHT TURNS RED...

... AND YET A LARGE BLUE SEDAN, NEGLECTING TO STOP, DASHES THROUGH THE JUNCTION.

IMMEDIATELY...

TWEEEEEEE

What are you doing?... You ran the red light!!

Sorry! The boss is waiting for us!

BUT AT THAT MOMENT, A 4CV COMES OUT OF FAUBOURG SAINT HONORÉ AND...

BANG!

WHILE THE RENAULT, BOWLED OVER BY THE VIOLENT IMPACT, CRASHES INTO A BUS, THE FORD THUNDERS ON, FLEEING TOWARDS LA CONCORDE!!

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: MORTIMER, BEING A PROPER, WELL-EDUCATED GENTLEMAN, SPEAKS FLUENT FRENCH IN HIS INTERACTIONS WITH FRENCH PEOPLE, OF COURSE.

THE ACCIDENT HAS DRAWN A CROWD...
How boorish!
Did someone see the licence plate?
There were two guys inside...
It was a Ford...
It's something ending in... 8-CL-75... I think the fender is bent on the right side...
Yes... a Custom!
Probably gangsters!
ROYAL CONCORDE

SOON, THOUGH, TRAFFIC RESUMES...
TWEEEE
All right, move along!
TAXI

Did you see that, guv'? Guys like that, I'd lock them up for life, I would! Just to show othe...
LIBRE

BUT THE DRIVER STOPS MID-SENTENCE AND EXCLAIMS:
Good grief! Look at this! What a mess!

THE HUGE LA CONCORDE SQUARE, ONTO WHICH THE TAXI HAS JUST ARRIVED, LOOKS LIKE AN INFERNAL CIRCUS RING SWEPT BY FURIOUS GUSTS OF WIND, AND FROM WHICH HUNDREDS OF VEHICLES TANGLED TOGETHER ARE ATTEMPTING TO EXTRICATE THEMSELVES!

And mind you, guv', the weather report talked about a "noticeable improvement"... Some improvement this is!!
You don't like meteorologists...?

Meteorologists! A bunch of jokers sold out to the raincoat and brolly merchants! Ah! There you are!

THE TAXI HAS STOPPED IN FRONT OF LES INVALIDES STATION, MORTIMER'S DESTINATION. THE PROFESSOR SWIFTLY STEPS OUT OF THE VEHICLE...
How much?
That's 200 francs on the metre...
SNCF PARIS-INVALIDES VERSAILLES

IN THE TICKET HALL, A LARGE AND GROUCHY CROWD IS GATHERED...
Have you heard? It's the last train for Versailles!
Yes, the tracks are blocked... The Seine is still rising!
They've just announced that the Orsay station was going to take over service from the Invalides station...
I've heard that the Institute is threatened as well... A half a mile-long pile of books to move away! Can you picture it?
Come on, all aboard, quickly!
... Saint-Maur has it even worse: The Marne broke through its levies. You move about in rowboats!...
BILLETS

IN MORTIMER'S COMPARTMENT THE CONVERSATION REVOLVES INEVITABLY AROUND THE DAY'S HOT TOPIC...
Say, did you see? It's no better abroad. In England, in Holland, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Germany, everywhere floods, tornados, storms!!? And they say it's even starting in the U.S.A.!
Hey, look here!... Billancourt's already underwater !
The harvest is ruined...
And not one plausible explanation... The bomb, of course... but...

Ha! That takes the cake! Listen to what the weather column has to say!... "The disturbances that have caused the weather over Western Europe are in the process of weakening. An improvement is expected soon."
LE MATIN
The cheek of it!
You know what I think? The people at the met office are all morons, starting with their director!...

IN HIS CORNER, MORTIMER SMILES FAINTLY.
Well! Poor old Labrousse... Your ears must be burning hard right now!...

BUT WHILE, IN SPITE THE OBSTACLES THAT SLOW ITS PROGRESS DOWN, THE TRAIN DRAWS CLOSER TO ITS DESTINATION...

... AT THE "VERSAILLES - LEFT BANK" STATION, A TAXI DRIVER IS CHATTING WITH A CONDUCTOR.

So, Ernest, what's new in Jouy...? Is the weather any better than here?

Don't make me laugh... If Professor Labrousse hadn't sent me to pick up one of his friends, a Brit, I...

Labrousse? The director of the Météo(1)? Boy, you can congratulate him for me!

What now? Are you like all the smart alecks around here who blame him for the weather? It's not like he's the one making the seasons!

WITH THAT, THE TRAIN ENTERS THE STATION...

Goodness! What a crowd...

... Ah! I think that's my customer there!

Sorry, sir, are you Professor Mortimer?

Yes...?

Mr Labrousse asked me to take you to Jouy... His car broke down...

All right! Let's go.

AND SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, THE TAXI IS ON ITS WAY TO JOUY.

Blimey... that's some rain!

How is Professor Labrousse? Very busy, I imagine...?

Rather, sir! I've rarely seen someone as worried!

... And no wonder! He can't take a step out of his home without being harried by this man or that... "So, Professor, isn't it going to change?"... "So, Professor, what about the sun? Tomorrow, maybe?"... Blah blah blah! As if he had anything to do with it, the poor man!

Hmm! I see...

THE TAXI DRIVES ON DESPITE THE EVER WORSENING WEATHER. BUT, SUDDENLY, THE DRIVER EXCLAIMS IN A VEXED TONE...

Good grief! What's happening to these blasted wipers now?

INDEED, FOR A WHILE NOW THE RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT OF THE BLADES HAS BEEN SLOWING DOWN AND CAN NO LONGER KEEP THE WINDSCREEN CLEAR OF THE WATER FLOWING ONTO IT...

Darn! Better keep a sharp lookout...

Indeed! I...

TAXI

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, AS THE TAXI CROSSES THE SAINT-CYR ROAD, MORTIMER ROARS...

WATCH OUT!!!

A BIG SHAPE(2) BUS HAS JUST APPEARED A FEW YARDS AWAY, BRAKING DESPERATELY...

(1) LA MÉTÉO: COMMON NAME FOR THE "DIRECTION DE LA MÉTÉOROLOGIE NATIONALE — THE FRENCH METEOROLOGICAL INSTITUTE

(2) SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED POWERS EUROPE — NATO HEADQUARTERS

WITH AN INFERNAL SCREECHING, THE BUS STOPS, ALMOST BY MIRACLE, MERE INCHES FROM THE TAXI...

!

SCREEEEEE

?

AND A GI'S FACE APPEARS AT THE WINDOW...

You idiot! Why don't you drive a pushcart instead!

TAXI

WITH THESE HARSH WORDS, THE BUS MANOEUVRES CLEAR AND DISAPPEARS BEFORE THE FURIOUS EYES OF THE DRIVER, WHO EXCLAIMS VENGEFULLY...

Up yours, Yank! Oh, sorry, sir!

That's quite all right, my friend, I'm British...

THE TAXI DRIVES ON, BUT DOESN'T GO MUCH FURTHER BEFORE...

That's it! They're stuck!... I have to see what's wrong!

Is it the relay?

No, the battery is shot!

... No wonder the wipers failed! And of course the lights and horn are going to do the same... Ah, gosh darnit! Talk about bad luck! And now night's falling! Oh, dear...

BUT THE SOUND OF AN ENGINE INTERRUPTS HIM, AND A POSTAL VAN COMES TO REST ALONGSIDE THE TAXI.

I knew I'd seen those wheels before! What's happening, Ernest? Trouble?

I'll say! My battery's gone!

Don't sweat it, mate, I'm gonna bail you out! You just place yourself behind me and follow nice and easy, and never take your eyes off my red lights... How's that?

Louis, you're a real mate!

THE PLAN IS IMMEDIATELY EXECUTED, AND THE TAXI BEGINS DRIVING IN THE VAN'S WAKE...

All right, Ernest?

POSTES

Go on, mate!

EVERYTHING GOES PERFECTLY FOR OVER HALF A MILE, BUT IN THE MEANTIME NIGHT HAS FALLEN AND THE LIGHTS ARE GETTING LESS AND LESS EFFECTIVE...

I have to say I don't know what we'd have done without Louis...

BUT AS THE CARS APPROACH THE BEND BEFORE THE CLIMB TOWARDS THE ARCADES OF BUC, THE GROUND SUDDENLY DISAPPEARS FROM UNDER THE TAXI'S FRONT WHEELS, AND...

!

!

... AFTER A SERIES OF BUMPS AND THUMPS THAT VIOLENTLY SHAKE THE FRAME, THE SIMCA COMES TO A STOP IN FRONT OF A ROAD SIGN...

Good grief! Can you believe it? Unmarked roadwork! Louis will be gone before we've had a chance to get out of this, and...

There, now! No need to get so upset... Anyway, look, he's waiting for us...

TAXI

THE TWO RED LIGHTS ARE INDEED STILL THERE, REASSURINGLY IMMOBILE IN THE DARKNESS...

SEINE

ROADWORKS

BUT AFTER MANAGING TO EXTRICATE HIS CAR AND DRIVING CLOSER TO WHAT HE BELIEVES TO BE THE VAN'S TAIL LIGHTS, ERNEST LETS OUT AN ANGRY CRY.

Oh, darn it! Work site lanterns!! And Louis is gone!!!

Damned! I could have sworn...

MEANWHILE, SUSPECTING NOTHING, THE POSTMAN HAS GONE ON AND IS NEARING THE TOP OF THE HILL...

The cheek of it! Stopping in a curve!

So...? The headlight?

Hey, boyo, this is how accidents happen, you know!

Shut up!(1)...

What the...!? Insulting honest people now? You reckless fool!

What!?!(1)

Drop it, Sharkey!

FURIOUS, LOUIS GETS UNDERWAY AGAIN AND, STILL GRUMBLING, PASSES UNDER THE AQUEDUCT, HEADING TOWARDS JOUY...

Those foreigners, they think they can do anything!

TOUSSUS-LE-NOBLE 5.

JOUY-EN-JOSAS

You moron! How many times must I tell you to speak French? This is really not the time to attract attention to us... Especially after that stupid accident on Royale Street... Come on, get in.

Er... Okay, boss...

AT THAT MOMENT, AND DESPITE THE SLOW DEATH OF ITS HEADLIGHTS, THE TAXI FINALLY REACHES THE ARCADES AND CATCHES SIGHT OF THE CUSTOM'S TAILLIGHTS. ERNEST SHOUTS.

Phew! There's Louis! He waited for us! Good man!

Another car! Let's go!

AS THE TAXI ACCELERATES, THE MYSTERIOUS CAR SUDDENLY DRIVES OFF.

Hey! Wait for us, will you!

Say, boss... It looks like they're chasing us!

What if it's the police...?

What's wrong with him? Why is he going so darned fast?

RHUH RHUH

Faster!!

EVEN THOUGH HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR THIS EVER MORE FURIOUS RACE, THE TAXI DRIVER TENACIOUSLY HANGS ON...

... He's nuts!!

What...? He disappeared!?!

No! He just turned right... But watch out! It must be a very tight bend!

THROWING CAUTION TO THE WIND, ERNEST HUGS THE CURB IN THE TURN AND, PEDAL TO THE METAL, DASHES AHEAD TO CATCH UP WITH THE RED LIGHTS...

Oh, think you're something else with your Peugeot, eh!... Just you wait!

BUT AT THAT INSTANT, A SILHOUETTE JUMPS OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND ACROSS THE ROAD!

LOOK OUT!!!

(1) SPOKEN IN ENGLISH

WITH A DESPERATE TWIST OF THE WHEEL, ERNEST TURNS HARD TO AVOID THE OBSTACLE. BUT THE TAXI IMMEDIATELY ROLLS DOWN A GRASSY SLOPE, SHAKING CRAZILY...

!

!

... AND PLUNGES NOSE FIRST INTO A LAKE!

SPLASH

AFTER HAVING EXTRACTED THEMSELVES WITH DIFFICULTY FROM THEIR PREDICAMENT, THE TWO MEN TAKE COUNSEL...

Well, we're in a right fix!! And it's all that blasted dog's fault! At least, I think it was a dog...

If it was indeed a dog, that would mean we are close to a house, and therefore to help.

Good thinking, sir! Listen, I'm going to climb back up and do some exploring... But just so I don't get lost, I'll ask you to stay with the car and honk every once in a while...

Very good. Go ahead!

WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, ERNEST STARTS TRUDGING UP THE SLIPPERY BANK, FOLLOWING THE GROOVES LEFT BY THE TAXI...

And this rain that just won't stop!

... AND SOON REACHES THE ROAD.

This is where we skidded off... And these are that nutcase Louis' tracks... Oh? Dirt! A dirt road... So he left the main road...?

Hey-oh! Everything's fine! I'll be right back!

RHUH

AND, WITH HIS EYES FIRMLY SET ON THE TYRE TRACKS, ERNEST TAKES OFF.

Where could he have been going, that blighter?

MEANWHILE, MORTIMER GIVES THE AGREED-UPON SIGNAL AT REGULAR INTERVALS, BUT...

The horn is getting fainter... The battery will be dead soon... and I'm soaked through!

RHUH

SUDDENLY, A DISTANT SCREAM STARTLES MORTIMER...

?

AAAAH!

HE IMMEDIATELY BEEPS THE HORN, BUT IT ONLY GIVES OFF A BARELY AUDIBLE SOUND...

Damn! He'll never hear me!!

SO THE PROFESSOR CALLS OUT WITH ALL HIS MIGHT...

HEY-OH! HEY-OH!

HE RECEIVES NO ANSWER... ALL HE CAN HEAR IS THE SOUND OF THE STUBBORN RAIN, AND THE ROAR OF AN INVISIBLE WATERFALL...

What a strange cry!?!

SUDDENLY...

Damn it! The light!!!

NO SOONER HAVE THESE WORDS ESCAPED HIM THAN THE HEADLIGHTS SHUT OFF WITH A LAST FLICKER, LEAVING HIM IN DARKNESS.

That's all I needed!

NOT DARING TO MOVE, MORTIMER CONSIDERS HIS CHOICES.

What to do? Leaving the taxi would be dangerous. Besides, if I...

Oh, what is that smell...? It's almost... Yes, actually, it smells like ozone! How strange!

BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO PONDER THE QUESTION FURTHER, FOR AT THAT MOMENT...

A dog! Ernest did it! Help is on its way!

WOOF WOOF

HEY-OH! HEY-OH!

Oh! It sounds like they're moving away! Hey-oh! Over here! Over here!

?

MORTIMER DASHES FORWARD, BUT THE SLICK GRASS BETRAYS HIS FOOTING AND...

... HE FALLS HEAVILY INTO THE LAKE!

SPLASH

THRASHING AMIDST THE TREACHEROUS PLANTS, HE FIGHTS HARD TO GET BACK ON THE BANK, BUT THE MUDDY BOTTOM DEFEATS HIS EVERY EFFORT!

HIS CLOTHES HEAVY WITH WATER, INCAPABLE OF SWIMMING, OUR FRIEND STRUGGLES IN VAIN AND HEARS THE DOG'S BARKING, NOW VERY CLOSE...

WOOF WOOF

Help!!! Ernest, help!!!

JUST THEN, A HIDDEN CURRENT TAKES HOLD OF HIM AND DRAGS HIM AWAY WITH IRRESISTIBLE STRENGTH...

HELP!

JOSTLED, HIT BY ALL SORTS OF DEBRIS, HE HEARS THE SOUND OF THE INVISIBLE WATERFALL DRAW CLOSER, UNTIL...

A sluice gate!

THE NEXT SECOND, HALF DROWNED, HE FALLS 12 FEET ALONGSIDE THE ROARING WATERS...

!

... THEN FLOATS AWAY AGAIN DESPITE HIS FRANTIC EFFORTS TO GET FREE FROM THE EDDIES!

... SUDDENLY HE CATCHES SIGHT OF A TUNNEL OPENING IN A HIGH WALL, INTO WHICH THE FOAMING WATERS VANISH!

!

MORTIMER BARELY HAS TIME TO DIVE TO AVOID THE ARCH AND IS IMMEDIATELY ENGULFED IN DARKNESS...

HOLDING HIS BREATH, BLOOD POUNDING, GRAZED BY THE WALLS, HE IS CARRIED AWAY LIKE FLOTSAM... UNTIL, UPON EMERGING INTO THE OPEN, HE IS BRUTALLY THROWN AGAINST A MASSIVE STONE BLOCK ONTO WHICH HE IMMEDIATELY HANGS.

WITH A POWERFUL EFFORT HE MANAGES TO PULL HIMSELF OUT OF THE WATER AND, AFTER COLLECTING SCRATCHES FROM BARBED WIRE...

... CLIMBS UP TO A SPOT WHERE THE LARGE STONES OF THE WALL HAVE COLLAPSED!

Where the devil am I?

A MOMENT LATER, DRENCHED AND FREEZING, HE RECOGNISES THE REASSURING ASPHALT OF A ROAD.

Bah, let's pick a random direction and see what happens!

STRUGGLING AGAINST THE FURIOUS GUSTS OF WIND, MORTIMER HAS BEEN WALKING FOR SOME TIME WHEN, BEHIND HIM...

By Jove! A car... I'll hitch-hike!

THE VEHICLE, A LARGE TRUCK, STOPS UPON SEEING HIS SIGNALS.

I got lost and fell into a lake... You wouldn't be going towards Jouy, now, would you?

You're lucky! It's on my way. Get in, sir!

THE REST OF THE TRIP GOES BY WITHOUT FURTHER INCIDENT AND, 20 MINUTES LATER, MORTIMER IS RINGING THE BELL AT PROFESSOR LABROUSSE'S GATE...

And thanks again for your kindness!

Don't mention it, sir! Good night...

Good Lord! Dear friend! There you are at last...! I just called the garage to get some news... But what is going on?

I was delayed by a small accident... Please pardon my appearance!

That's horrible! Come in! There's a nice bath waiting for you. Catherine will take care of your clothes and have a change prepared for you...

I recognise the old French hospitality...

AN HOUR LATER, AFTER AN AGREEABLY PREPARED DINNER DURING WHICH HE RECOUNTS HIS ADVENTURES, MORTIMER, FULLY RECOVERED FROM HIS EMOTIONS, EMPTIES A LAST GLASS OF POMEROL 1947...

Catherine, we will have coffee in the library...

Very well, Professor...

My congratulations, Catherine, dinner was excellent! You are a true cordon bleu!

Oh! The gentleman is too kind...

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS...

My friend, I would never have presumed to distract you from your occupations if I hadn't learned that you were in Paris for a few days. And if I asked you to come here rather than at the Quai Branly, it is because I wanted to keep our meeting strictly private and... confidential.

I see... And I even think I know the reason for your distress...

TAKEN ABACK, PROFESSOR LABROUSSE ASKS...

Oh, really...? Do tell!

Well, I am convinced you are going to ask me what I think of the current extraordinary meteorological fluctuations, which I imagine must be causing you no end of trouble...?

But how did you...?

My dear Labrousse, it's quite simple. I know your functions and responsibilities, and therefore also your problems. They are also, would you believe, mine, for as it happens, these atmospheric upheavals have our government as worried as yours.

Said government has charged me with establishing the causes at all costs. For us as much as for France, this deterioration of the climate could eventually have serious economic and political consequences...

I am glad to see that you share my perplexity, because, to be honest with you, my situation is becoming untenable. For if it is not expected of the Météorologie Nationale that it make the weather, it is considered a bit... excessive that it be wrong in its forecasts every time. Yet every day we make greater fools of ourselves!

It was believed until now that natural phenomena, and especially meteorological phenomena, obeyed laws that were more or less strict and unchanged for thousands of years. And yet, for some time now we have been plunged into complete chaos! To the point that, as incredulous as this might sound, like the man in the street I've almost started to blame atomic experiments!

Well... To be honest, it hasn't yet been possible to categorically demonstrate whether it is true or not...

DING

Ten-thirty! It's time for the TV news... Do you mind?

... In other news, near Saint-Michel-de-Maurienne, the Paris-Modane railway track, undermined by water, collapsed under the express train. Two smashed cars were swallowed by the Arc river gone wild...

Overnight from Saturday to Sunday, the raging North Sea battered the whole length of the English, Dutch and Belgian coasts, wreaking havoc and devastation...

The wreck of the Bruxelles-Rome plane that had been missing since Friday was discovered in the Bernina Range. Caught in a snowstorm, it slammed into a rocky slope...

DRRRING
DRRRING
DRRRING

Hello!... Yes, speaking... Yes, he arrived over an hour ago... The car had gotten stuck someplace or other and... Oh! That's unfortunate!... Please keep me apprised... Thank you!

That was the dispatcher... The driver is still not back...

... Pounded by the raging Po, the Vendramin dyke broke over a length of 600 feet. The waters are currently rushing through the gaping breach into the vast plains of Ariano...

I don't like the sound of that! It's true that with such weather... Anyway, I hope he won't be much longer...

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IN THE MEANTIME, ON TV, COMES NEWS OF DISASTER AFTER DISASTER...

... In central Europe the situation is getting more serious still. As in Bavaria, where the Danube and the Inn have joined forces and invaded Passau. The water has now reached the first floors of buildings...

If only I knew where the accident happened...

Don't you worry... Ernest can take care of himself...

A hurricane of unimaginable violence fell upon the Cote d'Azur, followed by a tsunami that caused many casualties and damaged the harbour facilities of Nice and Cannes...

... Swollen by torrential rain, the Turia, the Jucar and the Segura have overflowed, flooding half of the province of Valencia. The city itself has almost completely disappeared under the waters...

... An omen perhaps of more serious social disruptions to come: In Palermo, following the destruction of the crops and threatened by famine, workers are protesting...

... We will conclude with this report that a school teacher from Villeneuve-Minervois, in the Aude, announced that he had seen and photographed a strange ball of fire, one that he claims is linked to the current weather disruptions. Here is the document, which we are offering here with the customary cautions...

Here we go! It had to be expected! The hallucinations are starting...

It's unavoidable... The main thing is to distinguish the truth from the delusions...

Well, as you've seen yourself, it's getting worse and worse!

Indeed. And... once again I've received confirmation of something I'd already noticed...

... which is that, singular coincidence, only the Western world is hit, threatened with weakness and ruin... As if these terrible and puzzling disruptions were in fact of a deliberate nature...

A deliberate nature? Do you mean by this... Come now, that's impossible!!

Oh! This is merely a suggestion, maybe a bit potty, one that I offer for your consideration as a specialist... No! Don't answer anything yet. Besides, it's getting late!... Consider this idea at leisure... And now let's go to bed. Things will look clearer in the morning!

Well, I'll be...!?!

FIVE MINUTES LATER...

And this is your room. I hope...

BUT AS LABROUSSE ENTERS THE ROOM, A VIOLENT GUST OF WIND SLAMS THE WINDOW OPEN, WHILE A STRANGE LIGHT ILLUMINATES THE BEDROOM...

THE PROFESSOR DASHES TOWARDS THE WINDOW BUT FREEZES, DUMB-FOUNDED, WHEN...

... HE CATCHES SIGHT OF A STRANGE BALL OF FIRE, WHICH RAPIDLY CLIMBS INTO THE SKY AND THEN VANISHES A SPLIT SECOND LATER...

So, dear fellow, what is your diagnosis...? Hallucination, or...

I... er... Extraordinary!!

E. JACOBS

THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE RAIN HAS STOPPED, BUT A STRONG WIND IS PUSHING LOW, HEAVY CLOUDS ACROSS THE SKY.

Well! That's a welcome change at least!

Hello, Labrousse... I hope last night's little meteorological phenomenon didn't keep you from sleeping?

In truth, my dear fellow, your strange suggestion would have been enough to keep me awake all by itself!

... Drama at the UN. The Afro-Asian group left the room when the representative of the USA...

And may I enquire as to the result of your nocturnal brainstorming?

Well, coming from anyone other than you, I would have qualified such an idea as mere balderdash...

In France, the weather has measurably improved since last night, but...

DRRING

LABROUSSE

Sir, there are two gendarmes here asking to speak with you...

Oh...? Bring them in, Catherine...

Good morning, Professor...

Good morning, Sergeant. What can I do for you?

Do you know a man by the name of Philip Mortimer, a British national?

Of course! That's my friend right here... What do you want with him?

Please hand me your passport, sir.

My passport? Why, of course.

There it is, Sergeant... A little soggy, I'm sorry... But I had it with me last night when I took an... unexpected bath...

Erm!... Thank you...

AFTER HAVING CAREFULLY EXAMINED THE DOCUMENT, THE GENDARME CONTINUES...

Do you admit taking taxi number 6125 BD 78, driven by Ernest Brisson, yesterday after arriving at the Versailles-Rive Gauche station by the nine o'clock train?

Completely. But why such a question?

If you don't mind... At what time did you arrive at Professor Labrousse's?

Er... Around 9:45... but...

One moment... Can you tell me what you did between 7:00 and 9:45?

Very well... We headed towards Jouy-en-Josas. Shortly afterwards, because of some trouble with the battery, the windshield wipers stopped working and the headlights failed. Night was coming, and the driver tried in vain to effect repairs. A postal van then offered to open the way for us. A little later, as we tried to avoid an obstacle, we dove into a lake. Ernest left to get some help. While going to meet him, I fell into the water and the current bore me away. When I finally managed to get back onto a solid road, I was completely lost. I walked until a truck driver found me at a place he told me was called "Les Loges-en-Josas"... That's it...

And now, Sergeant, will you finally deign to explain to us the reason for this questioning?

The reason, Professor, is that the taxi was found this morning at the bottom of the lake at La Geneste!

Oh! And Ernest...?

A team is sounding the lake as we speak, but he hasn't been found yet!

Yes, the driver...?!

11

THE NEWS STARTLES THE TWO PROFESSORS...

The poor lad...! Did he fall in?

That's impossible! The car had stopped on the edge of the lake; how can you explain that it is now submerged!?

That is precisely what the investigation will reveal... In the meantime, I will keep this passport and ask you not to leave this area...

What's this, Sergeant? Am I to understand that my friend is to be implicated in this unfortunate affair? But that's absurd! I can vouch for him!

Let it be, Labrousse; The Sergeant is only doing his duty—but...

... may I at least know where the investigation stands?

All I can tell you is that the investigation team from Versailles is at the scene at this moment... Good day, gentlemen...

WITH THE GENDARMES GONE, LABROUSSE, OUTRAGED, EXCLAIMS:

Mortimer, this will not do at all! I will call the Minister. He's a friend of mine...

Please don't. It is much more urgent that I speak to the magistrate in charge of the investigation. Do you have your car?

It is at the garage for repairs... But it should be ready by now... Or at least I was so promised...

DESPITE MORTIMER'S IMPATIENCE, THE TWO MEN ONLY ARRIVE AT THE LAKE OF LA GENESTE 45 MINUTES LATER.

Some road!

Yes, and the rain hasn't improved it either!!

Ah, I can see some people over there!

We'll leave the car here...

THEY DRAW CLOSER. A SMALL GROUP LOOKS ON WITHOUT A WORD AS SEVERAL MEN ENDEAVOUR TO PULL THE TAXI OUT OF THE MUDDY WATER. SUDDENLY, MORTIMER SAYS:

Oh? How strange... I thought the banks were steeper...

Well, at night, everything seems so different!

Pardon me, gendarme. Could we have a word with the magistrate in charge of the investigation?

I'm sorry; all the gentlemen have just gone back to Versailles.

Would you like me to drive you there?

Come to think of it, no. Not right now; I have better things to do here...

... I'd like to examine this place and above all find the sluice gate or tunnel through which I was dragged last night...

GOING AROUND THE LAKE, MORTIMER INSPECTS THE BANK WITH GREAT CARE. BUT HE SEEMS MORE AND MORE NONPLUSSED...

This one...?

No... It was narrower and higher... And there was a gate...

SUDDENLY, AROUND A BEND, THEY SEE A LARGE BLUE SEDAN STOPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NARROW PATH THAT FOLLOWS THE SHORE...

Some people really have no manners at all...

Especially since this is a one-way path!

MEANWHILE, MERE FEET AWAY, TWO CHARACTERS HIDDEN IN THE BUSHES ARE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON THE MECHANICS WORKING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LAKE. AN ENORMOUS MASTIFF IS SITTING NEXT TO THEM...

So, boss...?

It's okay, Sadi... They're done...

BUT THE ANIMAL HAS CAUGHT THE SCENT OF THE NEWLY ARRIVED...

GR RRRR R...

WHO HAVE STOPPED TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE VEHICLE.

A Custom... Magnificent machine, but rather cumbersome. Monsieur Henri, my Paris neighbour, owns one just like it. Parking it is such a problem!

The owner of this one is a bit of a stuntman... See the bent grille and broken headlight!

FORD

2878 CL 75

CATCHING SIGHT OF THE PLATE, MORTIMER BLINKS...

2878 CL 75...? I'm not imagining things: This number ends just like the one from the Custom in Royale Street... Curious coincidence!

2878 CL 75

What do you mean...?

Well, if I'm not mistaken, this car caused a serious accident in Paris yesterday... It's strange to find it again here...

GRRRRR...

That voice...?

Coppers?

BUT THEN, SUDDENLY ESCAPING ITS MASTER'S ATTENTION, THE DOG JUMPS OUT OF THE BUSHES, BARKING FURIOUSLY...

WOOF WOOF!

... AND POUNCES ON MORTIMER! KICKING WILDLY, THE LATTER TRIES TO KEEP IT AT BAY, WHILE LABROUSSE COMES TO HIS AID WITH GREAT BLOWS OF HIS UMBRELLA...

WOOF!

THE WHOLE BUSINESS NONETHELESS THREATENS TO END VERY BADLY UNTIL LABROUSSE INSTINCTIVELY OPENS HIS UMBRELLA UNDER THE NOSE OF THE BEAST WHO, SURPRISED, GROWLS AND RETREATS...

GRRRR...

MEANWHILE, IN THE BUSHES, THE ONE WHO HAS JUST BEEN CALLED "BOSS" FURIOUSLY TURNS TOWARDS HIS HENCHMAN AND SNARLS...

Get that blasted mutt! That's enough trouble for today!

SADI, POPPING OUT OF THE BUSHES LIKE HIS DOG, GIVES A BRIEF ORDER THAT FREEZES THE ANIMAL IN PLACE...

Heel, Eblis!

GRRRR

I say! Can't you keep your monster on a leash?

And you, can't you go wandering somewhere else?

You should change that tone of voice, sir, or we might go straight to the police to file a complaint...

To the police...! Ha! Ha! Don't make me laugh!

Maybe you wouldn't be laughing so much if they were to ask you where the nice dent in this car came from...

What?! You dirty rat, I'll teach you to mind your own business!

BUT AS THE MAN IS ABOUT TO RUSH MORTIMER, A SHORT BLAST OF A WHISTLE, COMING FROM THE BUSHES, STOPS HIM COLD...

?

?

!

FWEEEET

Fine... But don't you come bother honest folk again!

How ironically funny of you to say!

Come, my friend, this man is a savage.

GRRRR...

THE TWO FRIENDS WALK AWAY.

What do you think of that whistle?

That this place seems to be a little too crowded to pursue our inquiry. Let's go.

TEN MINUTES LATER, THEY ARE BACK AT THE SPOT WHERE THEY LEFT THE CAR...

Since the road is one way, we'll go home through Haut Buc and the La Geneste woods...

All right...

1435 FV 75

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS...

Blasted dirt road... And what a desolate place...

Ha! You wouldn't be saying that in summertime. Then it's a real scramble...! As for the road, if it isn't very good at the moment, at least it has the advantage of taking us directly to Les Loges, where the truck picked you up...

1435 FV 75

Hey! But isn't this our amiable dog lover...?

Why, yes it is! Strange, he's on foot now...

?

1435 FV 75

AS THE CAR DRAWS NEAR, THE MAN HAS STOPPED WALKING, HOLDING BACK HIS DOG AS IT BARKS MADLY...

WOOF WOOF

You seem quite pensive. A penny for your thoughts?

Don't you know, but I'm starting to wonder if this couldn't have been the dog from last night...?

There... This is the entrance to Les Loges, where you met the truck...

Really...? It didn't feel like I had walked such a distance...

... But tell me... your neighbour from Paris... this Monsieur Henri... Does he have a dog...?

No, not that I know of... Come now, I hope you're not going to draw parallels between your adventure and a gentleman you know nothing of, just because he too happens to own a blue Custom?!

No, Professor, not for the moment. But something is starting to take shape in my mind... Something so vague and incredibly tenuous that I do not dare speak of it just yet...

FIVE MINUTES LATER...

Here we are!

Anything new, Catherine?

A telegram for Mr Mortimer...

A summons, no doubt...

NO SOONER HAS MORTIMER OPENED THE TELEGRAM THAN HE LETS OUT AN EXCLAMATION.

By Jove!

Bad news?

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Quite the contrary. My friend Captain Blake advises me that he will arrive in Paris tomorrow and asks me to call him at the Louvois Hotel, where he will be staying. Whatever the goal of his mission, I'm certain he will not refuse us a little help in unravelling this unfortunate affair... which is keeping us away from our scientific preoccupations!

May the Heavens hear you!

Lunch is served!

AN HOUR LATER, AFTER LUNCH...

And now let's get back to business... Could you lend me some old clothes, a pair of boots and a map of the countryside...?

I have a hunting suit that will do nicely. But... what are you planning? Don't forget that you could receive summons at any moment...

No matter! I can't afford to just cool my heels here! I intend to do a little investigating over there, so as to shed some light on one or two obscure points. And all the magistrates in the world won't stop me!

So be it... But do not tarry! Especially since it might snow soon!

SOME 15 MINUTES LATER, A FULLY EQUIPPED MORTIMER IS TAKING THE ROAD TO BUC...

HE HASN'T WALKED 100 YARDS WHEN A POSTAL VAN STOPS ALONGSIDE HIM.

Hey, mister! Aren't you Ernest's client? I saw you come out of the professor's home... If you're going to Buc, hop in!

Oh, is it Mister Louis? I think I will...

Ah, mister! I'm glad I met you! What a mess! The gendarmes were nagging at me for over an hour, and I still don't understand what happened last night... But maybe you...

It's quite simple! First we got ourselves tangled up in a work site, after taking the two lanterns that signalled the site for your taillights...

After we realised our mistake, we drove on as best we could until we saw your red lights again, and didn't let go of them until the accident!... But what happened on your side, then?

Here's how it is... As I told the gendarmes, I was going up the hill towards the Arcades when I almost slammed into a car stopped right in the middle of the bend, at the junction of the roads to Jouy and Toussus-le-Noble...

There! Next to the traffic light...

I see...

A guy who looked like a gangster was having a look at God knows what on the front of his car. I stopped to make a comment, quite politely, too, but the guy spat something in English back at me... Something about sending me to Hell!

What kind of car was it?

It was a big sedan, one of those large, chromed, American things...

... So I kept going towards Jouy through the arch of the aqueduct... I was so furious at that gangster that I was already at the Vauptain farm before I realised you weren't behind me anymore...!

Good grief...! Now I understand what happened! You went to the left and Ernest, arriving just after, thought he'd re-established contact with you, while in fact he was flying off towards Toussus-le-Noble behind that very sedan, which had just driven off again!

Yes, that must be it, mister...

VAUX

BUT THE VAN HAS REACHED BUC...

Thanks for the information and the ride!

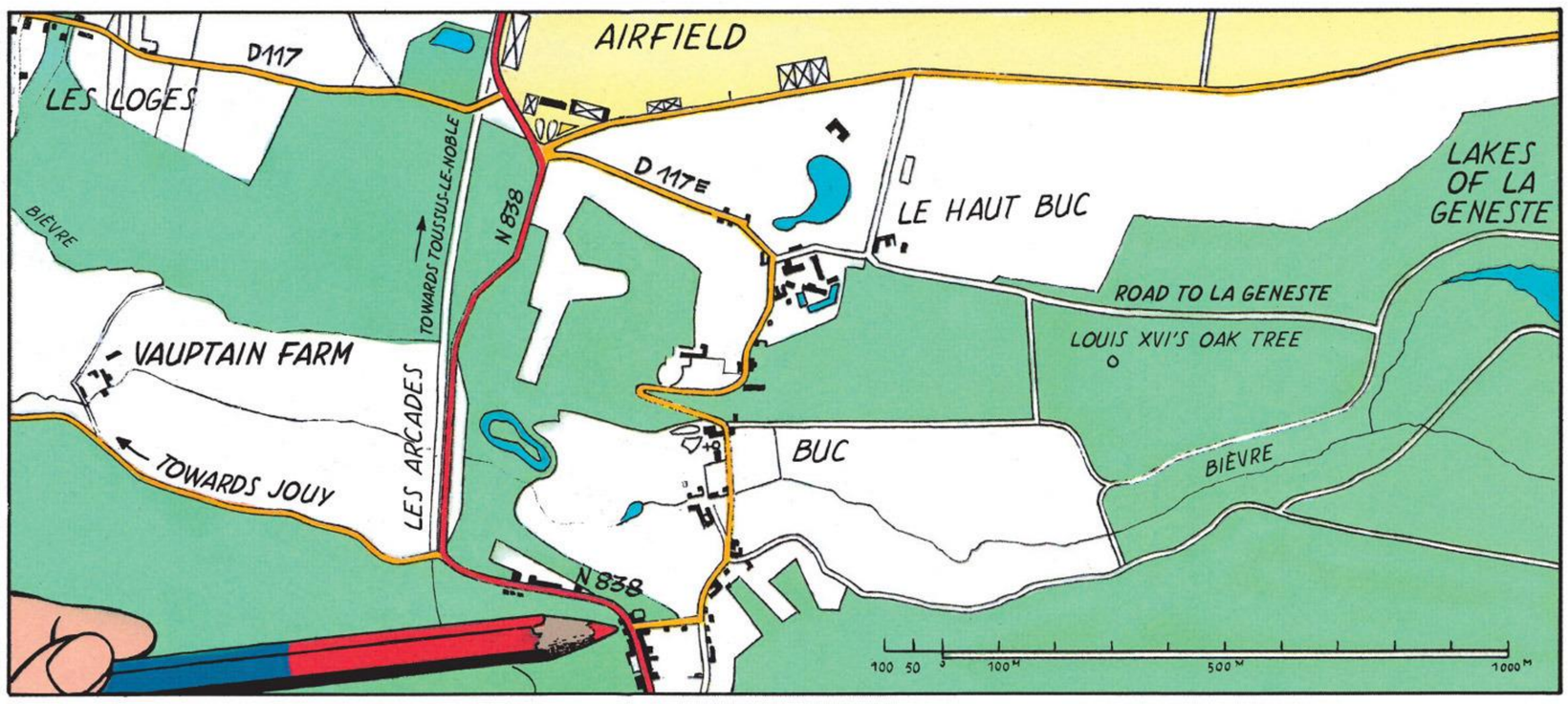
You're quite welcome, mister! Have a nice day!

15

E. P Jacobs

MORTIMER, NOW ALONE AND STANDING IN FRONT OF THE ROAD WORKS WHERE THE PREVIOUS DAY'S FATEFUL ADVENTURE BEGAN, UNFOLDS HIS MAP.

Now, to review the path we took... Let's see. I'm on National Road 838, precisely here...



THE PROFESSOR BEGINS CLIMBING THE HILL WHILE ANNOTATING HIS MAP WITH A RED PEN.

Right... Now let's get to the Arcades...

And this is the bend where the mysterious car was stopped, just across from the small road that leads to Jouy...

... Said car led us on the N838 up to the airfield, where it intersects the D117E at a right angle... So it's there that this particular bend where we almost overturned must be... I'll go check it out...

AFTER HALF A MILE, MORTIMER REACHES THE AIRFIELD.

There we are... The N838 continues left to Toussus-le-Noble, a small road leads to Guyancourt, and finally there's the D117E, with its 90-degree bend! I'll go on...

AS HE WALKS, MORTIMER ATTEMPTS TO REMEMBER EVERYTHING THAT PRECEDED THE ACCIDENT...

Here, Ernest accelerated even more to try and catch up to the red lights of what he thought was the Peugeot. So it's at the end of this straight stretch that the animal jumped across the road... Difficult to judge the distance, though... We were going so fast...

BUT MORTIMER STOPS, SURPRISED, FOR AHEAD OF HIM THE ENTRANCE TO A LARGE ESTATE FORCES THE ROAD TO BEND SHARPLY AROUND IT!

?

Good grief! We were quite lucky! In all logic, we should have crashed against this gate...! How disconcerting. I don't remember this bend...

HE IS ABOUT TO WALK ON WHEN SUDDENLY...

WOOF! WOOF!

!

AND HE SEES, JUMPING ABOUT BEHIND THE IRON FENCE, SADI'S DOG EBLIS!

This animal again! What in the devil is it doing here...?

WOOF!

OUR FRIEND IS NOT DONE WITH SURPRISES, FOR A STRANGE CACKLING SUDDENLY RESOUNDS BEHIND HIM.

WOOF!

?

HEH! HEH! HEH!

MORTIMER TURNS AROUND, SURPRISED, AND CATCHES SIGHT OF A STRANGE CREATURE WATCHING HIM THROUGH THE SLIGHTLY AJAR SHUTTERS OF A MISERABLE HOVEL.

Heh heh heh... He's a vicious one, ain't he?

INTRIGUED, HE STEPS CLOSER...

Looks like he don't like you... Heh heh heh...

Er... Indeed! To whom does it belong?

To your man... The guardian of Troussalet Castle...

Trou Salé...?

Troussalet... The factory, you know!

Oh, it's a factory? What does it produce?

AT THAT MOMENT, THE OLD GOSSIP CASTS A FURTIVE GLANCE TOWARDS THE CASTLE AND, WITH A STRANGLED CRY OF FRIGHT...

OH!

... SLAMS THE SHUTTERS CLOSED IN OUR FRIEND'S FACE IN LIEU OF AN ANSWER!

?

CLAC

DUMBFOUNDED, THE PROFESSOR WHIRLS AROUND TO LOOK IN THE SAME DIRECTION AND, FOR A SPLIT SECOND, SEES SADI'S DARK COUNTENANCE...

The man with the dog!

MORTIMER REMAINS TAKEN ABACK FOR AN INSTANT, AND THEN, WITH A SHRUG, GETS UNDERWAY AGAIN...

Strange people...! No matter; I'll get on with my investigation.

THE PATH MORTIMER IS WALKING ALONG, WHICH LEADS TO THE LAKES, FOLLOWS THE ESTATE'S WALL...

Ah! A bend...

... DESCRIBING SEVERAL BENDS...

Another one! That's the third...

... BEFORE LEADING, AFTER SOME 300 YARDS, TO THE EDGE OF THE WOODS OF LA GENESTE.

... Four!... And this is the path we took this morning to come back from the lakes...

CHEMIN DE LA GENESTE

Dammit! How is it possible that last night I could have failed to notice four bends so tight and so close together, over so short a distance? All the more so that at the speed we were going, it was almost inevitable we'd go into a skid...! But there are more troubling details still! From here to the lakes of La Geneste, there's still over a mile to go over a thoroughly potholed path, which brings the total distance between Arcades and lakes to about two miles. Yet between the time we began chasing the unknown car and the final dive, barely more than three minutes elapsed...! So!?!

CHEMIN DE LA GENESTE

... So there are only two possibilities left: Either there's a much shorter road between the Arcades and the lakes—a road not shown on this map—or...

It wasn't at the lakes of La Geneste that the accident took place!!!

... If that's the case, then I first have to find another lake. Then I'll have to discover who deemed it necessary to move the site of the accident. Unless... unless it was a criminal act!?!

AS HE THINKS, MORTIMER CASTS HIS GAZE ABOUT HIS DESOLATE SURROUNDINGS: ON ONE SIDE, THE FORBIDDING FACTORY WALL; ON THE OTHER, A GROUP OF OLD, UNSTABLE HOUSES, BLACKENED REMNANTS OF AN OLD BOMBARDMENT...

Perfect ambiance for a noir movie! This place must be completely deserted after dark... It should be quite simple then to...

BUT FOR SOME TIME NOW, THE SKY HAS BEEN CHANGING FROM LIGHT GREY TO THE COLOUR OF LEAD, AND SUDDENLY...

Goodness...! Snow, now!

A GUST OF ICY WIND CARRYING LARGE SNOWFLAKES SWEEPS THE ROAD. MORTIMER, NOTICING A HALF-RUINED SHED, DASHES FOR IT...

How lucky! Some shelter!

WHILE THE SNOW QUICKLY COVERS THE LANDSCAPE, MORTIMER, FOCUSED ON HIS PROBLEM, GOES ON...

... A 1:100,000 road map only shows the larger lakes, so smaller pools will remain unseen...

BUT AS TIME GOES BY, OUR FRIEND TAKES NOTICE OF A LOW RUMBLE BELOW HIS FEET...

?

HE GOES TO THE WINDOW AND CASTS A LOOK OUTSIDE...

!

... AND SEES, FLOWING UNDERNEATH THE SHED, A STREAM WHOSE SWOLLEN WATERS MAKE THE OLD WALLS VIBRATE...

Blimey! But... it looks like...!

WITH THREE LEAPS, MORTIMER IS ON THE BANK!

The arch, the stone blocks, the barbed wire, the breach... There's no doubt! This is where I pulled myself out of the water...

... And this happens to be drain-off of a lake located on the factory's grounds...! It's all clear now!! Last night, just after the airfield bend, we followed the other car right through the open gate. And that's when that blasted dog jumped across our path and drove us off the road and into the water...! I still need to figure out why these people thought it necessary to make the driver disappear and hide the real location of the accident?!!

... It would be rather appropriate to alert the police, but I would need to be certain of my theory... Because these rogues are devious enough to have erased all traces of the business... Besides, I have a feeling that "Trou Salé" must hold some secrets likely to be of interest to me...

Since there's no point in trying anything in broad daylight, I'll start by reassuring my good friend Labrousse, who must be worried sick...

A SICKNESS THAT MORTIMER WOULD PROBABLY CONTRACT, TOO, IF HE COULD HEAR THE STRANGE PHONE CALL THAT SADI IS PLACING...

... I just saw Beardy... He's wandering around the property... The dog sniffed him out... He spoke to the old crone... I think he must have been in the taxi last night... Yes... Very well!

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IN THE MEANTIME, UNAWARE OF THE THREAT LOOMING OVER HIM, MORTIMER HAS GONE BACK TO BUC AND LOCATES A SMALL CAFÉ...

Ah! That will do fine!

THREE MINUTES LATER, HE IS ON THE PHONE WITH HIS FRIEND.

Hello!? Yes, it's me... I'm calling you from Buc... Say again...?

For goodness' sake! Come back...!! The gendarmes just left here! By now they must be looking for you...! Your description...

I'm sorry, dear fellow, but I'm still missing a small piece of the puzzle... I'll just go have a quick look at the lake of Trou Salé, and then I'll head back! Yes, Trou Sa...

BUT THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF TWO GENDARMES CUTS THE PROFESSOR OFF.

Evening, Sergeant!

!

Hello! What was that...? Where...? Hello! Hello! He hung up... What the devil is he going to do at Trou Salé?

MEANWHILE, MORTIMER HAS WASTED NO TIME IN PAYING, AND HE EXITS THE CAFÉ DISCREETLY...

Nasty weather, isn't it...? So, anything new in that taxi business?

No... I hear the client is the main suspect...

People like that should be put up against a wall...

... BEFORE HURRYING BACK TO HIGH BUC...

BUC

BY THE TIME HE'S FINALLY BACK AT THE SHED, NIGHT HAS FALLEN.

No one in sight! Perfect...

HE IMMEDIATELY STARTS GATHERING THE OBJECTS HE'S ALREADY SPOTTED THAT WILL BE NECESSARY TO HIS EXPEDITION.

To work, now. Let's see, this ladder...

Erm... Rather rickety... Ah! That rope over there...!

BUT AS HE IS ABOUT TO WALK PAST THE FENCE WITH HIS EQUIPMENT, HE STARTS.

Dammit!

TWO CYCLISTS HAVE JUST ROUNDED THE CORNER OF THE FACTORY GROUNDS...

OUR FRIEND BARELY HAS TIME TO HOP BACK INTO THE SHADOWS...

Gendarmes...! I say! What a ridiculous situation... Professor Mortimer, gentleman burglar!!

BACK PRESSED AGAINST THE WALL, MORTIMER EXPECTS THE WORST, BUT FORTUNATELY THE PATROL PASSES BY WITHOUT SEEING HIM.

Phew!!

The coast is clear! Here I go!

TAKING THE LADDER AND ROPE WITH HIM, MORTIMER HURRIEDLY CROSSES TO THE OTHER SIDE.

HE IS OVER THE ROAD IN A COUPLE OF STRIDES AND LEANS HIS LADDER AGAINST THE ESTATE WALL...

A tad short, but I should be able to pull myself up!

ONCE ON TOP, HE DRAGS THE LADDER UP WITH THE ROPE IN ORDER TO PLACE IT ON THE OTHER SIDE...

TWO MINUTES LATER, HE'S MADE IT INTO THE PARK AND IMMEDIATELY TAKES STEPS TO SECURE HIS RETREAT...

Now to hide this...

WITH THAT DONE, HE CAREFULLY APPROACHES THE STREAM THAT, ON THE PREVIOUS NIGHT, HAD CARRIED HIM INTO THE TUNNEL BELOW THE SHED...

Yes, this is where I had to dive to avoid the arch...

FIFTY YARDS ON, HE LOCATES THE SLUICE GATE AS WELL...

Perfect!

... AND, WALKING OVER THE LATTER TO REACH THE OTHER BANK, AT THE BOTTOM OF A HOLLOW HE CATCHES SIGHT AT LAST OF THE GOAL OF HIS INQUIRIES...

The pond!!

HEART POUNDING, HE WALKS ALONG THE SHORE, INTENT ON LOCATING THE EXACT SITE OF THE ACCIDENT...

It's impossible to see any tracks with this snow...

JUST THEN, A STRONG SMELL OF OZONE REACHES HIS NOSTRILS...

There's that smell of ozone again!! No doubts now: This is indeed where the taxi got stuck in the mud!!!

CERTAIN NOW, MORTIMER DECIDES TO PROCEED WITH RECONNOITRING AROUND THE OLD CASTLE... HE WALKS AROUND THE LAKE AND CAN ALREADY MAKE OUT THE VAGUE SILHOUETTES OF DARKENED BUILDINGS WHEN...

... HE FALLS FLAT ON HIS FACE, HIS FEET CAUGHT IN AN INVISIBLE OBSTACLE!

?

HE TRIES TO STAND UP, BUT HE IS TANGLED IN AN ENORMOUS NET...

Blimey! A camouflage net!

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BUT AS HE STRUGGLES FREE, MORTIMER FAINTLY HEARS, COMING FROM A GROVE OF HOLLY OAK, A STRANGE PURR...

?

RRNRRNRRN...

... ASTONISHED, HE LOOKS ON AS THE TREES FOLD DOWN FROM THE MIDDLE, REVEALING A GLEAMING CUPOLA...

RRNRRNRRN...

... WHICH OPENS IN TURN INTO A SLIT THROUGH WHICH FILTERS A GREENISH GLOW.

RRNRRNRRN...

TWO LONG RODS RISE RAPIDLY, ONE CARRYING A DISK, THE OTHER SOME SORT OF CYLINDER...

THE DISK IMMEDIATELY STARTS ROTATING QUICKLY, SWEEPING THE AREA METHODICALLY...

AT THIS SIGHT, MORTIMER FINALLY UNDERSTANDS THAT HE HAS UNWITTINGLY TRIGGERED A DETECTION DEVICE...

A radar!!!

... AND, SHAKING OFF HIS SURPRISE, JUMPS TO HIS FEET AND RUNS AWAY...

BUT HE IS INSTANTLY LOCATED BY THE INFERNAL DEVICE AND TARGETED BY A JET OF PHOSPHORESCENT GAS PROJECTED BY THE CYLINDER!

Oh! What is this?!?

REDOUBLING HIS EFFORTS, HE MANAGES TO REACH THE SLUICE GATE AND RUSHES TOWARDS THE OTHER BANK, STILL ENGULFED IN THE MERCILESS JET...

Damned...! This torpor!?!

A FEW STEPS FROM THE WALL, HE FALLS TO HIS KNEES, AS IF CRUSHED BY EXHAUSTION...

I... I can't go on!

STRUGGLING DESPERATELY, HE NONETHELESS MANAGES TO GET UP AGAIN AND GRAB HIS LADDER...

Come on... Up...! You have to!

USING ALL THE ENERGY HE HAS LEFT, HE ATTEMPTS TO SET IT UP...

I must... get out of here... out...

BUT ONE LAST PROJECTION OF GAS OVERCOMES HIM, AND HE FALLS BACK HEAVILY, DEFEATED!

Ahh!!!

JUST BEFORE PLUNGING INTO NOTHINGNESS, HE MAKES OUT THREE GHOSTLY SILHOUETTES, LOOMING OVER HIM AND PINNING HIM UNDER THE GAZE OF THEIR MASSIVE EYES...

E.P. JACOBS 21

THE NEXT DAY, LATE MORNING. SAUSSAIES STREET, PARIS, DST(1) HEADQUARTERS

MINISTÈRE DE L'INTERIEUR

... BLAKE, HEAD OF THE MI5(2), IS MEETING WITH DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER PRADIER TO DISCUSS A SERIOUS ESPIONAGE CASE THAT HAS LED HIM TO COME TO FRANCE.

... In conclusion, I remain convinced that the heart of this mysterious network must be sought within Paris itself...

That's also my opinion. Unfortunately, we still don't have any really convincing clues...

... just as we still don't know its exact mission... Which is why we have placed under surveillance the mail of several foreign firms that, for various reasons, have awakened our suspicions. I should receive the results of the latest analyses any time now. But to be quite frank, I have little hope...

JUST THEN, THE LAB CHIEF ENTERS THE ROOM.

Well, Durand?

WITH A TELLING FROWN, DURAND PUTS HALF A DOZEN SEEMINGLY INTACT LETTERS DOWN ON THE DESK...

Nothing... Absolutely nothing!

What did I tell you, Blake!

BLAKE'S HAND MOVES FORWARD...

Would you mind...?

Not at all...

ONE BY ONE, HE CAREFULLY EXAMINES THE ENVELOPES... SUDDENLY...

Oh, the "Scandinavia" is among your suspects? How curious: Our services also dealt with this firm a few...

BUT HE ABRUPTLY STOPS...

Do you have a magnifying glass?

Yes, right here... but...

AFTER A FEW SECONDS OF SCRUTINY, BLAKE CALMLY ANNOUNCES...

Yes, that's what I thought!

HANDING THE LAB CHIEF ONE OF THE ENVELOPES, HE ADDS...

Doesn't anything strike you as unusual in the crest...? Look closely...

SCANDINAVIA STOCKHOLM.

Er... No, I... I don't see anything out of the ordinary... The letters...

I'd suggest you focus on the crown's second pearl...

SOMEWHAT SURPRISED, THE MAN COMPLIES, AND...

SCANDINAVIA STOCKHOLM

... ALMOST IMMEDIATELY LETS OUT A CRY OF ASTONISHMENT.

Damn and double damn!

WITHOUT ANY MORE EXPLANATIONS, HE RUSHES OUT THE DOOR, TAKING THE PRECIOUS DOCUMENT WITH HIM...

Just a minute, boss!!!

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(1) DIRECTION DE LA SURVEILLANCE DU TERRITOIRE: FRENCH INTERNAL SECURITY AND COUNTERINTELLIGENCE, ATTACHED TO THE MINISTÈRE DE L'INTÉRIEUR (STATE DEPARTMENT)
(2) MILITARY INTELLIGENCE—A SPECIAL BRANCH OF THE INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

DURAND HAS BARELY LEFT THE ROOM WHEN BLAKE, AFTER GLANCING AT HIS WATCH, ASKS A STILL TAKEN ABACK PRADIER:

Would you permit me to place a call? I was supposed to meet Mortimer and Professor Labrousse at the "Louvois"...

By all means... but...

Hello! The "Louvois"...? Captain Blake here. I'd like to speak to Professor Mortimer...

I'm sorry, Captain, Mister Mortimer is not here, but Professor Labrousse is in the hall... If you don't mind...

A SHORT WHILE LATER, LABROUSSE IS ON THE PHONE...

Hello! Captain Blake...! I must tell you I'm very worried...

AFTER LISTENING WORDLESSLY TO THE PROFESSOR TELL OF HIS FRIEND'S DISAPPEARANCE, BLAKE GOES ON...

Well... I'll have to stay at the DST for some time still. Could you join me there? Ask for Commissioner Pradier... Very good. See you soon.

AS BLAKE PUTS THE HANDSET DOWN, PRADIER, WHO HAS WAITED WITH SOME IMPATIENCE FOR THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, EXCLAIMS:

Well, now, dear fellow, will you finally tell me what it was you saw on that envelope that had Durand so excited?!

Oh! It's not very complicated, really...

... While looking at the crest printed on the envelope, I noticed that one of the crown's pearls gleamed under the glancing light, and I immediately concluded that this pearl was actually a microfilm, likely holding some data of great interest to us...

By golly! Zapp's(1) micro-dot trick...! But how did this nitwit Durand manage to...?

Don't blame him too much! It was just routine work, without any precise goal. Whereas for me, on the contrary, the "Scandinavia" was an old acquaintance... Moreover, the trick here was to camouflage the "dot" as an element of decoration rather than punctuation, as was the case for Zapp's "micro-dots"...

Speaking of this... Who's the correspondent of this firm in Paris?

Oh, some ridiculous name... Wait... One **Per Enrik Quarnström**...Import-export trade... As a matter of fact, I'm going to find some information on that individual... I'm calling records... Who knows...

WHILE THE COMPLEX MACHINE OF COUNTERINTELLIGENCE GETS UNDERWAY, PROFESSOR LABROUSSE ARRIVES AT SAUSSAIES STREET...

... AND A SHORT WHILE LATER...

Professor Labrousse is here, Commissioner...

Good morning, Professor! Come in, please. May I introduce Captain Blake...

Delighted to meet you, Captain...

How do you do?

BUT JUST THEN DURAND REAPPEARS...

Here's a blow-up of the pearl...! But as for what the message is, your guess is as good as mine!

PRADIER AND BLAKE BEND OVER THE STILL-WET PHOTOGRAPH, ON WHICH THEY CAN SEE A LONG SERIES OF NUMBERS IN GROUPS...

XXX 131
1112Z 07001
83170 9199-
60210 893--
08799 99136
99172

(1) FAMOUS GERMAN PROFESSOR, INVENTOR OF THE SYSTEM

EVENTUALLY, PRADIER SAYS...

Erm! A coded message, obviously... But we'd need to know its key... The "Crypto" will probably get us out of that particular fix... But it could take some time, and...

.. And every minute counts!

May I...?

LABROUSSE, WHO HAS SHYLY GOTTEN CLOSER, TAKES A QUICK LOOK AT THE PHOTOGRAPH AND...

If I'm not mistaken, gentlemen, I believe I can help you...

What...? Really... Are you joking, Professor?

Not at all... This is nothing more than the coded transmission of a meteorological observation message, such as those regularly performed by the stations controlled by the WMO(1), in order to produce weather predictions!

Well, I'll be...!!!

MAKING GOOD ON HIS EXPLANATIONS, LABROUSSE BEGINS TO READ QUICKLY BETWEEN HIS TEETH...

Three X1... Hmm. Probably the identifier for the emitting station... Region 1... 11 of this month... 12 o'clock... Oh? Universal time... France... 001? Probably the identifier for the receiving station... Cloud cover absolute... N.W... 70 knots... visibility... etc... violent storm, snow.... Atmospheric pressure.... Etc.... Cumulonimbus... altitude 600 feet. Oh! Oh! Barometric trend... 13.6 millibars...! Tornadoes!!! N.W... Well, that's it... It's quite clear...

Oh, you think so!? And it means...?

It means that in the coming hours we can expect serious perturbations coming down from the North Pole... Provided these indications follow international standards, since the identifiers of these stations are unknown to me, as are their respective locations, actually...

... Furthermore, another detail seems peculiar to me.... the date! Such messages always carry the date of the day the observations were made! In this case, the 11th...! And yet, today's only the 10th! I don't understand.

... Especially since the letter was mailed in Stockholm on the 9th, which means the observations would have been made on Tuesday the 8th...! Which would mean that these are not **observations** made on the 11th, but **forecasts** made for the 11th!!

Observations or forecasts, why on earth would anyone have those sent secretly from abroad, when the same data are readily available in any newspaper, from the radio, or can be requested directly from the people at Quai Branly?

It is strange, indeed... So strange that...

That...?

That I'm seriously starting to wonder if these aren't much more... specific indications, in relation to a theory of Professor Mortimer's, which I believed implausible...

What sort of theory, Labrousse?

Well... Professor Mortimer believes that the aberrant weather we are currently victims of would not be an act of Nature, but rather one of... Man!

UPON HEARING THOSE WORDS, PRADIER BURSTS OUT!

Oh, come now, Labrousse! This is pure science fiction! Of course, there are those attempts with dry ice or silver iodide...! But none of it has gone beyond the stage of laboratory experiments!!

BUT BLAKE CUTS IN...

I don't share your opinion, Pradier... If Mortimer came up with such a hypothesis, it certainly wasn't without a serious reason. Besides, I might as well tell you now: The reason he came to France was that he'd been unofficially tasked with locating, if possible, the point of origin of the phenomena that are disrupting the climate!!!

What...! You've reached that point at the I.S.!?!

Yes, my dear fellow, and if Mortimer is right, then everything falls into place: The network we are investigating and whose mission we couldn't fathom is in fact transmitting orders and special meteorological instructions from abroad to a central station (probably located somewhere near Paris). A station that, in turn, will transfer these messages to a number of sub-stations, charged with—God knows why!—disrupting the course of nature!!!

That's extraordinary!

Good heavens!!!

OBVIOUSLY SHAKEN, PRADIER SUDDENLY MAKES A DECISION...

Very well, then...! I'm going straight to the Director! Maybe I'll look like a fool, but so be it! Let's meet here at eight o'clock. We'll have some important decisions to make!!!

All right!

(1) WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANISATION

AFTER HAVING MADE ALL THE NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS WITH PRADIER, BLAKE AND LABROUSSE HAVE LEFT THE DST...

And now let's take care of Mortimer...

Yes, I'm worried by his silence!

First I have to make a quick stop at my apartment on Vaugirard street. I need certain documents for tonight's meeting.

Very well. We'll take the opportunity to call your house in Jouy... Maybe Mortimer left a message?

DURING THE TRIP, LABROUSSE INFORMS BLAKE OF MORTIMER'S ADVENTURES ON THE NIGHT HE ARRIVED, AND OF HIS TROUBLE WITH THE LAW. HE CONCLUDES BY EMPHASIZING HOW IMPORTANT THE PROFESSOR CONSIDERED IT TO FIND THE EXACT LOCATION OF THE ACCIDENT...

... AND SO, WHEN THEY ARRIVE AT VAUGIRARD STREET, THE CAPTAIN HAS A FAIRLY COMPLETE PICTURE OF THE SITUATION...

We're here!

Anyway, where is this "Trou Salé"?

I do not know... I've never heard of such a place... Of course, I didn't have time to investigate in depth...

AS THEY WALK PAST HER DOOR, THE BUILDING'S CARETAKER APPEARS...

Oh! Sorry, Professor, I thought it was Mr Henry's secretary... I have some mail for him...

Well, then, give it to me, Mrs Petit. That'll save you climbing up there, and since we're neighbours...

Oh! Thank you, Professor... Here it is...

AT THAT MOMENT, "MONSIEUR HENRI" IS ON THE PHONE ABOUT HIS "SECRETARY", AND THE GOOD LABROUSSE WOULD BE VERY SURPRISED TO KNOW THAT THE MAN SPEAKING TO HIS NEIGHBOUR IS NONE OTHER THAN SADI, THE MAN WITH THE DOG!

What's that? He took the Custom even though I forbade it? Fine... I'll teach him to go against my orders... One other thing: How is our guest doing...? Don't...

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Someone's at the door... I'll call back...

Ah! Hello, Professor! Do come in...

Some other time, my dear sir. I am in a hurry... Here is some mail for you...

BUT, AT THAT MOMENT, "MONSIEUR HENRI" SUDDENLY CATCHES SIGHT OF BLAKE, WAITING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LANDING, AND HE CANNOT RESTRAIN A VIOLENT START.

How!!?

What's wrong?

BUT THE MAN HAS IMMEDIATELY STEPPED BACK INTO THE SHADOWS OF THE ANTEROOM AND FAKES A COUGHING FIT...

Kof! Kof!... It's... tis tamned tracheite... ant tis horrible weater... I hafen't peen out in eight tays...

Well, would you believe I thought we passed each other in Buc yesterday morning... I was...

In Puc...!?! Kof! Vat a strange itea...! I titn't go to Puc...!!! Kof! Kof!

Ah! I'm sorry... I thought I'd seen your car near the lakes of...

My car!?! Vrong, Professor! I tink tere must pe more tan one American car in Paris, yes?

But...

AND ON THESE WORDS, "MONSIEUR HENRI" CUTS OFF LABROUSSE AND HURRIEDLY CLOSES HIS DOOR...

Not very well disposed, that neighbour of yours...

Strange... He's usually so polite...

WHILE LABROUSSE, FOLLOWED BY BLAKE, ENTERS HIS OWN APARTMENT, "MONSIEUR HENRI" HAS RUSHED TO A DRAWER, FROM WHICH HE QUICKLY TAKES A PAIR OF HEADPHONES...

... WHICH HE IMMEDIATELY PUTS ON.

Hell and damnation! I must find out what he came here for!!

UNAWARE THAT THEY ARE UNDER SURVEILLANCE VIA MICROPHONE, CLEVERLY HIDDEN FROM VIEW BY A MOULDING...

I'm calling Jouy... I'm dying to know...

BLAKE AND THE PROFESSOR CONVERSE FREELY.

Your neighbour, is he foreign? What a strange accent!

Yes, he's Scandinavian, Finnish or Swede, I don't... Ah! If you don't mind... It's Catherine!

MEANWHILE, THE MUCH-DISCUSSED BLUE CUSTOM HAS JUST PARKED IN FRONT OF THE BUILDING, JUST BEHIND LABROUSSE'S CITROËN...

The boss is going to bawl you out!

Don't worry! I know how to handle him...

... AND A MOMENT LATER, THE "SECRETARY" IS INSIDE WITH "MONSIEUR HENRI"...

Hey, boss! What's...?

Shut up!

... So, no news whatsoever from Professor Mortimer...? That's terrible! What's that...? Ah! The tax collector knows a place called "Trou Salé"...?

Now that's interesting! Tell her we're on our way!

HAVING LEARNED WHAT HE WANTED TO KNOW, "MONSIEUR HENRI" TAKES HIS HEADPHONES OFF...

Is the Custom downstairs?

Yes, boss... Freddy's with it... Actually, about the car, I'd like to...

Stow it, Sharkey. Keep your stories... Instead, why don't you try to guess who's in the apartment next door right now...?

Blake!! Captain Francis Blake of the MI5!!! The man who so thoroughly hoodwinked you in the case of the Chamber of Horus!(1)

Bl... Blake!?! Him? Imposs...

... By the devil! I'm going to...

Calm down! Listen carefully... Enough blunders now... We'll have to be on our toes, and to hell with idiots. Understood...? Good. Now this is what you're going to do...

SOON AFTER, BLAKE AND LABROUSSE HURRY TO THEIR CAR THROUGH THE EVER MORE VIOLENT GALE...

We'll go through Meudon and Bièvre!

Let's hope the road is passable!

BUT THEY HAVE BARELY STARTED OFF WHEN SHARKEY RUSHES OUT OF THE GATE IN TURN...

Quickly, follow that Citroën!!!

Gotcha!

(1) SEE THE MYSTERY OF THE GREAT PYRAMID.

THE SNOW HAS STOPPED FALLING, BUT AS SOON AS THEY LEAVE PARIS, THE GUSTS BECOME SO VIOLENT THAT LABROUSSE, DESPITE HIS BEST EFFORTS, HAS HIS HANDS FULL PREVENTING THE CITROËN FROM BEING BLOWN OFF COURSE...

Yes, according to the tax collector, the "Trou Salé" is some kind of marsh near Toussus-le-Noble.

JOUY

... AND SO FAILS TO NOTICE THAT THE CUSTOM IS ON THEIR TAIL.

Stay behind this truck; it's safer.

Okay.

AN HOUR LATER, LABROUSSE AND BLAKE STOP IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE IN JOUY, WHILE, A HUNDRED YARDS BEHIND, THE CUSTOM DOES THE SAME...

Let's go in for a minute before we go to the tax collector's—it's not far!

All right!

AS THEY COME IN, CATHERINE COMES TO THEM, A TELEGRAM IN HER HAND.

It just arrived, Professor...

Give it quick; it might be from Mortimer...

It is! Listen: "Am held for investigation—all is well—tell Blake not to worry—apologies and regards—Mortimer."

TAKING THE TELEGRAM FROM LABROUSSE'S HANDS, BLAKE EXAMINES IT INTENTLY FOR A MOMENT, THEN SUDDENLY...

Well... Well... This telegram was sent from Paris at 15.00—just when we set out for Jouy—from a post office in the 6th Arrondissement...

The 6th Arrondissement...? But that's mine...! How strange. Why did Mortimer, who knows where I live in Paris and was in the neighbourhood, send me a telegram here, when he had no idea we'd be coming back to Jouy...?!

Exactly. In truth, it's almost as if our conversation with Catherine over the phone was spied upon by someone who'd like very much to stop us from making any inquiries...

If that's the case, it means that we have a solid lead!

The more I think about it, the more I feel that this telegram is a fake and that our friend is really in danger!

Then we must immediately go to the "Trou Salé" in order to see if we can learn anything there...

AND WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, THE MEN HURRY OUT...

We will have to make haste if we want to be in Paris at the arranged time!

Especially since the snow made the road to Toussus difficult!

BUT WHEN LABROUSSE PULLS THE STARTER, THE ENGINE, TO HIS SURPRISE, FAILS TO RESPOND...

Ah! Breakdown...?

How about that!? It just came back from the garage!!

Yiyiyiyiyiyi

AFTER LIFTING THE BONNET, BLAKE'S TRAINED EYE CONDUCTS A QUICK INSPECTION!

Hmm! The carburettor seems perfectly fine... Let's see the ignition...

BUT SUDDENLY HE EXCLAIMS:

Damned! It's as I feared: sabotage!!

What?!

See here! The distributor cable was cut!!

The fiends!!!

27

BUT LABROUSSE'S OUTRAGE SOON TURNS TO ASTONISHMENT...

Such impudence...! In broad daylight, and almost under our noses!! How did they do it!?

That's precisely what I'm wondering, and...

BLAKE STOPS SUDDENLY, FOR HE HAS JUST NOTICED THE CUSTOM WAITING SOME DISTANCE AWAY.

Say... Wasn't the car you saw at the lakes the same blue as this one?

Er... Yes, actually...! Although, with this snow, it's difficult to be certain...

THE CAPTAIN QUICKLY GOES ON...

Something else... This "Monsieur Henri", does he own a dog...?

What? You, too!? Mortimer asked me the same question. I even smiled at the idea of a mastiff among the precious trinkets of the fastidious Mister Quarnström!

DESPITE HIS CUSTOMARY COMPOSURE, BLAKE STARTS!

What? What name did you say?!

Quarnström... Per Henrik Quarnström, that's right! You know how French tongues are twisted by foreign pronunciations. So that's why he is more commonly referred to as "Monsieur Henri."

And, of course, he works in import-export trade...?

That's correct, but...

BUT BLAKE IS NO LONGER LISTENING, AND, LEAVING THE STARTLED PROFESSOR STANDING THERE, HE LEAPS TOWARDS THE HOUSE...

Quick!!

Captain!

1435 FV 7

... AND RUSHES TO THE TELEPHONE!

Goodness, what's going on?

Not a second to lose!

HAVING QUICKLY DIALLED PRADIER'S NUMBER, HE TRIES IN VAIN TO CONTACT THE COMMISSIONER, BUT THE DEVICE REMAINS SILENT...

Hello! Hello! Hello!

AS HE LOWERS THE HANDSET AT LAST, HE WHISPERS...

Well played! The phone is cut!!

The telephone? As well...!? Good grief! Will you explain at last?

Well, it just so happens that "Monsieur Henri", your dear neighbour, is none other than the addressee of the secret message you deciphered this morning, and more than likely the leader of a mysterious sabotage network with a rather original mission: **disturbing the weather!**

Good Lord!!!

... Having learned that you'd recognised his Custom at the lakes of La Geneste and having probably overheard our telephone conversation, he understood that his real identity was in danger of being discovered. So he had us tailed and gave the order, as a preliminary precaution, to keep us bottled up in here so as to cut us off from our friends in Paris... It's clear that if we try to leave this house, we will immediately be stopped by whoever is inside that car parked in the street...

Unbelievable!!!

LEAVING LABROUSSE, WHO IS BEWILDERED BY THESE ASTONISHING REVELATIONS, BLAKE WALKS TO THE WINDOW...

And yet Pradier must be alerted at all costs, because "Monsieur Henri" could disappear at the first hint of trouble...! But the Citroën is out of order, the blackguards in the Custom are watching us, and I am unarmed...! What to do...?

STRUCK BY A SUDDEN INSPIRATION, BLAKE TURNS BACK TO HIS COMPANION.

How can you get to Paris aside from the road?

Since the train route between Versailles and Paris is cut, all that's left is the line between Jouy and Massy-Palaiseau. From there you can take the Paris underground. But I have no idea of the timetables. And... how to reach the Jouy station unseen...?

Leave that to me! Is there a back way out of the house...?

No... But by going through the gardens on the hillside, you could make your way to a path that runs alongside the Montebello park; then turn right into an alleyway that intersects the street about 10 yards behind the Custom and then goes straight down to the station...

Perfect! As for you, my dear fellow, do what you can to convince these ruffians that we are still here, and as soon as it becomes possible again, call Pradier... Tell him to meet me at Vaugirard street soonest! But be careful: These are dangerous people!

Don't worry—I served in the Army!

A SHORT WHILE LATER, THE TWO MEN ARE SAYING THEIR GOODBYES AT THE BACK OF THE PROFESSOR'S GARDEN.

Good luck!

Thank you!

BLAKE IS ALREADY ON THE WALL WHEN LABROUSSE SUDDENLY CALLS HIM BACK.

Psst! Blake! I just thought... Since you're going Vaugirard street, why don't you take my keys... They could come in handy.

Really, my dear Professor, you could have made an excellent detective!

A MOMENT LATER, BLAKE DISAPPEARS INTO THE BRUSH...

MEANWHILE, IN THE CUSTOM, SHARKEY'S IMPATIENCE IS REACHING BOILING POINT.

Oh, sit tight! You know the boss doesn't want us to act without orders.

Yeah! Well, I'm going to go and do a little snooping around this place... I smell a rat...

PAYING NO FURTHER HEED TO HIS ACCOMPLICE'S WARNINGS, SHARKEY HAS SNUCK INSIDE THE GARDEN AND, HAVING MADE HIS WAY AROUND THE HOUSE, NOTICES A DOOR SLIGHTLY AJAR, THROUGH WHICH COME SOUNDS OF DISHES BEING WASHED...

The kitchen! Okay!

AT THE SAME TIME, LABROUSSE, NOW BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM, IS GETTING READY TO PLAY HIS PART AS AGREED...

Let's show ourselves at the window, so that...

BUT SUDDENLY...

!

AAAH!

My God! That was Catherine's voice!?!

THE PROFESSOR DASHES DOWN THE CORRIDOR...

Catherine!! Cath...

BUT A MASSIVE SILHOUETTE SUDDENLY APPEARS FROM THE SHADOWS, A 7.65 PISTOL IN HAND.

!?!

Just a second, gramps!

29

STARTLED FOR A SECOND, LABROUSSE PULLS HIMSELF TOGETHER AND CALLS OUT TO HIS ATTACKER...

Who are you?! What did you do with Catherine?

Don't you worry, she's nice and cosy down in the cellar... And now, get out of the way! I've gotta have a word with ol' buddy Blake!

Stay away from that door!

Enough of that, shrimp!

PUSHING LABROUSSE AWAY BRUTALLY, SHARKEY BURSTS INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND LETS OUT A SHOUT OF RAGE...

Dammit! He split!!!

FURIOUS, THE SCOUNDREL BEARS DOWN ON THE UNFORTUNATE PROFESSOR.

Where's Blake? Speak, or else...

I don't know.

Oh, is that so? Wait until I refresh your memory!!

IN THE MEANTIME, THE CAPTAIN HAS ARRIVED AT THE ANGLE OF THE ALLEYWAY AND THE STREET WHERE THE CUSTOM IS PARKED.

I'll try to cross without being seen!

Now!

AND AT THE SAME TIME, FREDDY, THE OTHER BANDIT, IS STARTING TO GET WORRIED.

Where the devil is he...? I've got half a mind to...

BUT HIS VOICE STOPS SUDDENLY AS, DUMBFOUNDED, HE SEES BLAKE RUNNING TOWARDS THE STATION IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR...

!

HE JUMPS AT THE SIGHT...

Halt!

!

BUT BLAKE IS LEGGING IT DOWN THE SHORT STREET...

I'd better run for all I'm worth!

AT THAT MOMENT, INSIDE LABROUSSE'S HOUSE...

So, are we going to be sensible, or do I have to... "insist"?

I... I will tell you nothing, cur!!

SUDDENLY!

!

BANG

BANG

IT'S FREDDY WHO, SEEING BLAKE ABOUT TO GET AWAY, HAS GONE ALL IN AND SHOT AT HIM!

Missed!!!

AS FOR SHARKEY, HE'S BACK AT THE CUSTOM IN THREE SHAKES.

Are you nuts?!

Quick, he got away!

THE TWO BANDITS JUMP INTO THEIR CAR AND TRY TO TURN IT AROUND, BUT ITS SIZE AND THE STATE OF THE STREET MAKE THE MANOEUVRE DIFFICULT!

Will you hurry?! Wake up!

Ah, forget it. I'll go around the block!

MEANWHILE, BLAKE, WHO WITH A MAD RUN HAS TAKEN A SIZABLE LEAD...

... IS NEARING THE GOAL AT LAST...

The station!!!

BUT JUST THEN HE SEES THE CUSTOM SPEEDING DOWN A SIDE STREET TOWARDS HIM...

There he is!!!

Look out, the curve! Brake! Brake, you moron...

I'm trying...! But we're sliding!!!

2878

HURTLING AT HIGH SPEED, THE MASSIVE CAR TAKES THE BEND TOO SHARPLY AND...

... INEVITABLY SPINS AROUND! AFTER TWO FULL TURNS AROUND ITSELF...

EEEEEEEEE

... IT CONCLUDES ITS PERILOUS ACROBATICS BY SLAMMING LOUDLY AGAINST A CONCRETE POLE!

BANG

UNHURT BUT STUNNED, SHARKEY AND FREDDY REMAIN SLUMPED IN THEIR SEATS...

FORD

BUT AS PASSERSBY RUSH TO THEIR HELP, BLAKE HAS SPOTTED A POSTAL VAN IDLING THERE. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSION, HE DOESN'T HESITATE...

I don't have much choice!

... AND A MOMENT LATER...

VROOOM

MY VAN!...

31

... OUR FRIEND TAKES OFF AT THE WHEEL OF THE POSTAL VAN!
Thief!
Thief!
POSTES
AT THAT MOMENT, THE TWO BANDITS, FINALLY REGAINING THEIR SENSES, ASK...
Hey? What...!? What thief...?
A thief...! What... What's going on...?
My van! He swiped my van!!!
Hell!!
It's him!!! It's got to be him!!!
BUT SHARKEY HAS ALREADY RECOVERED...
Right! Police! We were after him, actually! Which way did he go?!
He just turned after the Zoology Institute!
No problem! We'll catch up to him in no time! Let's go!!
Wait! I'm coming with you!
BUT FREDDY'S NOT LISTENING AND GUNS THE ENGINE!
VRAOOM
!
MEANWHILE, BLAKE IS TRYING TO TAKE AS BIG A LEAD AS HE CAN...
As soon as I reach Massy-Palaiseau, I'll call... Dammit!
A HUNDRED YARDS AHEAD OF HIM, A ROAD CROSSING OF THE JOUY-MASSY LINE IS STARTED TO CLOSE...
DING
DONG
BUT OUR FRIEND STEPS ON THE ACCELERATOR AND SQUEEZES THROUGH...
VRAOOM
DING DONG
141-TS
WHEREAS THE CUSTOM, WHICH HAS JUST TAKEN THE TURN AT THE INSTITUTE...
That's him!
He got through!
DING DONG
... BARELY HAS TIME TO BRAKE TO A FULL STOP!
EEEEEEEEEEEE
7878 CL 75
AND WHILE SHARKEY AND FREDDY WAIT, RAGING, BLAKE REACHES THE WINDING STRETCH OF THE ALBIAN VALE...
If all goes well, within 15 minutes I'll have lost them!
POSTES
... NOT AWARE THAT A NEW DANGER HAS JUST APPEARED...
Hello...! Hello! The gendarmerie!?
P
32

THE GATE HAS BARELY STARTED OPENING AFTER THE TRAIN HAS PASSED WHEN THE CUSTOM LEAPS FORWARD!

Four minutes! We lost four minutes...! Step on it!!!

VRAOM

2878 CL 75

Faster! Faster!!

I can't—not with all those curves!

Hey, wait a minute... What about Professor Labrousse...? He'll have the cops after us in no time!

No chance of that... Before I ran off, I sent him to join his maid in the cellar, with a little love tap on the back of the head, of course!

Ah! A straight stretch at last! Go, floor it!!

VROOOOM

AND SOON BLAKE, WHO, AT THE OTHER END OF THAT STRETCH, IS DESPERATELY TRYING TO KEEP WHAT SMALL LEAD HE HAS ON HIS PURSUERS, CATCHES SIGHT OF THEM IN HIS REARVIEW MIRROR!

That's not good!

FOR THEIR PART, THE BANDITS HAVE ALSO SEEN HIM AND ALREADY CONSIDER HIM CAUGHT...

... And if he doesn't come quietly?

In that case, too bad for him! That'll be one less MI5 agent!!

BAD LUCK! NOW, 300 YARDS AHEAD OF HIM, BLAKE SUDDENLY DISCOVERS AT THE CROSS-ROADS OF THE SACLAY ROAD TWO GENDARMES WAVING AT HIM TO STOP!

If I stop, the two behind will be upon me before I have a chance to explain myself, and then...

SO HE BARGES THROUGH, FORCING THE GENDARMES TO JUMP ASIDE HURRIEDLY!

RRRRHUH

FURIOUS, ONE OF THEM DRAWS HIS PISTOL, BUT...

Look out! Here comes another one!

AND THE CUSTOM, WHOSE OCCUPANTS HAVE EVEN BETTER REASONS NOT TO STOP, SHOOTS PAST...

RRRRRRRHUH

... LEAVING THE GENDARMES DUMBFOUNDED.

Good grief! These guys are insane...! It looks like the second vehicle is chasing the first one... It's probably the police officers the mailman spoke of...

No doubt! We have to call headquarters!

The van just went through the Saclay crossroads at top speed, heading towards Igny... A big American car is chasing it!

IGNY

Right! I'll alert the motorcycle patrol!

33

IN THE MEANTIME THE TWO VEHICLES HAVE KEPT UP THEIR INFERNAL PACE, BUT BY THE ENTRANCE OF IGNY BLAKE'S LEAD HAS SHRUNK DANGEROUSLY...

This time he's toast!

WITHOUT SLOWING DOWN, THE VAN ENTERS THE PEACEFUL VILLAGE AND CAROMS DOWN THE MAIN STREET...

RRRHUH

... AT THE END OF WHICH TWO CRS(1) OF THE MOTORWAY PATROL ARE WAITING IN AMBUSH...

Careful not to drive off in front of our plainclothes colleagues and get squished...!

Here they come!

INDEED, THE PEUGEOT FLIES BY, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY THE CUSTOM...

POSTES

... AFTER WHICH THE BIKERS FOLLOW IN PURSUIT RIGHT AWAY...

ROAW ROAW

THIS UNEXPECTED ESCORT IS NOT TO THE TWO BANDITS' TASTE.

What rotten luck!

We have to lose those two!

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NARROW STREETS, FREDDY MANOEUVRES SO AS TO PREVENT THE CRS FROM OVERTAKING HIM, BUT THEY QUICKLY REALISE WHAT HE'S DOING.

What on earth? What are they doing...? They're trying to block us!?

Hey, it's simple: They want to get all the credit for the catch!

THE TWO VEHICLES ARE THROUGH IGNY IN AN INSTANT, AND IT'S WITHOUT SLOWING DOWN ONE BIT THAT THEY COME UPON A DANGEROUS BEND IN THE D117 ROAD.

USING THE BEND, ONE OF THE MOTORCYCLISTS ACCELERATES IN AN ATTEMPT TO PASS THE CUSTOM ON THE LEFT...

Don't let him get past us!

FREDDY IMMEDIATELY PULLS BACK IN, FORCING THE BIKER TO VEER VIOLENTLY TO THE RIGHT...

!?

2873 CL75

UNFORTUNATELY, HIS PARTNER, WHO HAS BEEN FOLLOWING THE CAR CLOSELY, ARRIVES AT THE SAME INSTANT, AND THEY ARE UNABLE TO AVOID THE COLLISION!!!

BANG

34

(1) "COMPAGNIES REPUBLICAINES DE SECURITE" (REPUBLICAN SECURITY COMPANY) — RIOT POLICE, GENERAL RESERVE, AND URBAN AREAS MOTORWAY PATROLS OF THE FRENCH POLICE

WITHOUT A THOUGHT FOR THE ACCIDENT THEY HAVE JUST CAUSED, THE OCCUPANTS OF THE CUSTOM GO BACK TO THE CHASE...

Well played, Freddy! That's two who won't be bothering us anymore!

Yeah! Provided we don't take our time along the way!

AS FOR BLAKE, WHO KNOWS NOTHING OF THE INCIDENT, HE'S CONTINUED SPEEDING TOWARDS MASSY-PALAISEAU. HE'S ABOUT TO REACH THE IGNY STATION WHEN, SUDDENLY, HIS HEART SINKS AS HE SEES THE GATE OF A CROSSING CLOSING AHEAD OF HIM!

DING DONG

CRUEL IRONY... HE IS STOPPED PRECISELY BY THE SAME TRAIN THAT HAD STOPPED HIS PURSUERS 10 MINUTES EARLIER IN JOUY.

EEEEEEEE

AFTER STOPPING WITH A HEAVY HEART, HE FINDS HIMSELF AT A LOSS FOR AN INSTANT, WHILE IN HIS REARVIEW MIRROR THE FORD QUICKLY GROWS IN SIZE...

BUT THE SIGHT BRINGS HIM BACK TO HIS SENSES. HE JUMPS OUT OF THE VAN...

... CLEARS THE GATE IN A SINGLE LEAP...

... AND, WHILE THE CUSTOM, UNABLE TO SLOW ITS MOMENTUM IN TIME, SLAMS INTO THE ABANDONED VAN, BLAKE, RUNNING AS FAST AS HE CAN, MANAGES TO CATCH UP TO THE LAST CARRIAGE...

BANG

GRABBING ONE OF THE PIPES OF THE PNEUMATIC COUPLING SYSTEM, HE HOPS ONTO THE TOWING HOOK JUST AS THE TRAIN PICKS UP SPEED...

... UNDER THE VERY NOSE OF THE TWO GANGSTERS WHO WATCH IT HAPPEN, ASTONISHED.

In five minutes he'll be in Massy-Palaiseau, from where he'll surely take the subway to Paris, and once there...

Damned! We have to prevent him from contacting the DST at all costs! Let's go!

WITH THIS, AND AS THE GATE IS STARTING TO LIFT, THE TWO BANDITS RUSH BACK TO THEIR CAR. BUT THE STATIONMASTER APPEARS!

Hey! Hang on a minute... You're not just leaving like that! You've half destroyed this van and...

BUT SHARKEY, IN A TONE THAT BROOKS NO REPLY:

Police! We were after its driver, a dangerous car thief!

Oh!? In that case... I...My apologies, inspector...

AND THE CUSTOM, ITS FRONT SMASHED IN BUT THE ENGINE UNDAMAGED, FLIES OFF TOWARDS THE MASSY-PALAISEAU TRAIN STATION!

VRAOOM

AS THE TRAIN ROLLS ON, A FREEZING RAIN HAS SUDDENLY BEGUN FALLING, DRIVEN IN SHEETS BY VIOLENT GUSTS...

... RENDERING BLAKE'S SITUATION MORE AND MORE UNCOMFORTABLE.

Ah! Massy-Palaiseau at last!

INDEED, THE MASSY-PALAISEAU STATION, A SPRAWLING MAZE OF WEAVING TRACKS, IS GROWING RAPIDLY CLOSER...

SOON AFTER, THE SPEED DECREASES, AND...

Now's the time. Go!

HAVING SUCCESSFULLY JUMPED ONTO THE BALLAST, BLAKE SPRINTS ACROSS TRACKS AND SWITCHING POINTS TOWARDS THE PLATFORMS.

BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THE CUSTOM HAS JUST STOPPED IN FRONT OF THE STATION IN A GREAT SQUEAL OF BRAKES!

Quick! Gotta hurry!!!

We sure ain't getting tickets! Let's go over the railing!!

Hey, we're policemen after all!

HAVING THUS TAKEN A SHORTCUT, THE TWO BANDITS HAVE SOON LOCATED ON THE ALMOST DESERTED PLATFORMS THE SILHOUETTE OF THE MAN THEY'RE AFTER...

There! That's him!!!

PARIS

FORTUNATELY FOR OUR FRIEND, THE UNDERGROUND TRAIN TO PARIS IS ARRIVING!

Damnation! We're not on the boarding platform!!!

What!? He's gonna get away again!?!

PARIS

ENRAGED BEYOND REASON, SHARKEY STARTS FORWARD, ROARING...

Like Hell! We're crossing!!

BUT FREDDY BARELY HAS TIME TO HOLD HIM BACK. BLINDED BY FURY, SHARKEY HASN'T SEEN THE OTHER TRAIN COMING SUDDENLY FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION!!

STOP!

747

Good grief!!!

That was close!!!

AND THE TRAIN PASSES THROUGH, EVENTUALLY REVEALING THE OPPOSITE PLATFORM, NOW DESERTED, WHILE THE UNDERGROUND TRAIN TAKING BLAKE TO PARIS DISAPPEARS IN THE DISTANCE!!

?!

?!

E.P. JACOBS '56

THE TRAIN RUNS QUICKLY ON THE ANCIENT SCEAUX LINE, AND STATION FOLLOWS STATION: CROIX-DE-BERNY, SCEAUX PARK, BAGNEUX, ARCUEIL HAVE ALREADY GONE PAST...

STANDING IN THE PACKED CAR, BLAKE STUDIES THE MAP DISPLAYED OVER THE DOOR AND ESTABLISHES A PLAN OF ACTION.

The best way is to go directly to the DST by Denfert-Rochereau, Montparnasse-Bienvenue and La Madeleine. I just have to get there without incident!

BUT "MONSIEUR HENRI'S" HENCHMEN HAVEN'T GIVEN UP, AND THE CUSTOM IS DRIVING AT BREAKNECK SPEED ON THE N20 THAT RUNS ALONG THE UNDERGROUND LINE...

VROOOM

HIS NOSE TO THE MAP, SHARKEY, TOO, IS DRAWING PLANS...

He's probably going to head to the DST, and for that he has no reason to leave the subway... We must intercept him before Denfert-Rochereau!... The next station is Cité Universitaire. We have to get there before him. I'll take care of finding him and doing what needs to be done! You'll wait for me at the terminus of Luxemburg...

Gotcha!

... SHARKEY DASHES TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE TO THE CITÉ UNIVERSITAIRE STATION...

Good hunting!!!

... AND MAKES IT THROUGH THE GATE JUST IN TIME.

That was close!

CITÉ U

1 CLASSE

THE TRAIN HAS BARELY STOPPED WHEN THE BANDIT RUSHES THROUGH THE CROWD TOWARDS THE LAST COACH.

You brute!

Hey! Watch it!

AND, WITHOUT PAYING ANY HEED TO THE PROTESTS, BEGINS TO SEARCH THE CARRIAGE SYSTEMATICALLY ...

SUDDENLY, AS THE TRAIN IS NEARING DENFERT-ROCHEREAU, BLAKE, STANDING AT THE BACK OF THE FIRST-CLASS COACH, SPOTS SHARKEY (WHOM HE RECOGNISES RIGHT AWAY(1)) COMING THROUGH THE CONNECTING DOOR...

GUESSING HIS INTENTIONS, OUR FRIEND BEATS A HASTY RETREAT TOWARDS THE NEAREST EXIT.

I must try to run as soon as the train stops!

THE DOOR HAS BARELY SLID OPEN BEFORE HE'S ALREADY JUMPED ONTO THE PLATFORM. UNFORTUNATELY, SHARKEY HAS BEATEN HIM TO IT, AS IF HE'D READ HIS MIND, AND IS CUTTING HIM OFF FROM THE EXIT...

1ª CLASSE

SORTIE

SEEING HIS ESCAPE ROUTE BLOCKED, BLAKE HURRIEDLY GETS BACK ONBOARD JUST AS THE DEPARTURE SIGNAL SOUNDS, IMMEDIATELY MIMICKED BY HIS OPPONENT...

WITHOUT WASTING A SECOND, BLAKE TAKES REFUGE ON THE NARROW LEDGE THAT ALLOWS PASSAGE BETWEEN THE CARRIAGES, INTENDING TO GET TO THE LEAD ONE.

Z 23287

BUT HE STOPS SUDDENLY, FINGERS AROUND THE HANDLE, AS A THOUGHT STRIKES HIM.

Devil! If I get myself cornered inside the lead carriage, my number's up!!

JUST THEN, THE TRAIN ENTERS THE TUNNEL UNDER THE OBSERVATOIRE JUNCTION.

OH!

(1) SEE THE MYSTERY OF THE GREAT PYRAMID.

A SPLIT SECOND BEFORE, THOUGH, BLAKE HAS NOTICED THE IRON RUNGS THAT GIVE ACCESS TO THE ROOF.

Well! No hesitation!

HIS FOOT IS STILL ON THE TOP RUNG WHEN SHARKEY BARGES ONTO THE LEDGE...

Ha! Think you can escape me?!

... AND WITHOUT HESITATING CONTINUES INTO THE LEAD COACH...

1

BUT HAVING SEARCHED IT IN FULL, HE IS FORCED TO ADMIT THAT HIS OPPONENT ISN'T INSIDE. AT A LOSS, HE HEADS BACK TO THE LEDGE.

Damn! He can't have just disappeared!!!

JUST THEN, THE TRAIN EXITS THE TUNNEL AND COMES TO A REST ALONG THE PORT-ROYAL PLATFORM...

SORTIE

SORTIE

BUT THE LIGHT OF DAY INSTANTLY REVEALS THE IRON LADDER TO SHARKEY.

By the Devil!!!

IT TAKES THE MAN MERE SECONDS TO CLIMB IT, AND...

?

Finally, I've got you!!!

2

... PULLING OUT HIS PISTOL, HE DRAWS A BEAD ON BLAKE, WHO IS CROUCHING ON THE LEAD CARRIAGE'S ROOF...

Just wait, you dirty rat!

!?

BANG

?

BUT JUST AS HE PULLS THE TRIGGER, THE TRAIN ROLLS OFF AGAIN, SENDING THE SCOUNDREL DOWN THE LADDER, WHILE BLAKE, WITH EXTRAORDINARY REFLEXES, GRABS THE EDGE OF THE GLASS ROOF AND REMAINS SUSPENDED IN THE AIR...

WHILE THE TRAIN LEAVES TOWARDS THE LUXEMBURG TERMINUS, BLAKE QUICKLY PULLS HIMSELF UP ONTO THE ROOF...

Saved!

FIVE MINUTES LATER, FREDDY, GUARDING THE UNDERGROUND EXIT, SEES SHARKEY EMERGE, ROARING, HIS FACE DISTORTED BY FURY...

Whoa!

He gave me the slip at Port-Royal!!!

What!?! But that leads him nowhere useful...

Exactly!... By the Devil, yes it does! He's capable of going to...

Quickly!! To the Custom!!!

BUT AS THE TWO GANGSTERS NEAR THE CAR, THEY SPOT TWO POLICEMEN LOOKING AT IT WITH SUSPICION.

Hell! Our car's description has been posted everywhere...

What can we do!?!

SUZE SUZ

38

E.R JACOBS

JUST THEN, BLAKE, WHO'S MANAGED TO LEAVE THE PORT-ROYAL STATION, FLAGS DOWN A TAXI...

69 bis, Vaugirard street. Be quick about it!

Right!

PORT-ROYAL

LIGNE DE SCEAUX

AS HE HEADS TOWARDS THE PARIS HOME OF PROFESSOR LABROUSSE, HE QUICKLY PLANS AHEAD...

By the time I've called Pradier, the bird will have been warned by his accomplices and will have flown the coop! Better to surprise him in the nest... assuming he's still there!!

FIVE MINUTES LATER, OUR FRIEND RUSHES INTO THE PORCH OF 69 BIS...

Quite a good idea Labrousse had to lend me his keys!

PASSING BY THE CARETAKER'S APARTMENT, HE QUESTIONS THE WOMAN.

Good evening, Madam... Professor Labrousse gave me a message for Monsieur Henri... Is he at home?

Oh, most likely yes! He hasn't gone anywhere since noon.

ARRIVING IN FRONT OF THE MYSTERIOUS CHARACTER'S DOOR, BLAKE HEARS THE CLICKING OF A TYPEWRITER.

Perfect!

AND WITHOUT LINGERING ANY LONGER, HE QUIETLY MAKES HIS WAY INTO THE PROFESSOR'S APARTMENT.

I'll try not to turn on any lights; it'd be safer...

And now to call Pradier! Hey... But first let's see...

IN THE HALF LIGHT, BLAKE BEGINS EXAMINING THE WALL THAT SEPARATES THE TWO APARTMENTS. SOON HE LETS OUT A SATISFIED EXCLAMATION.

I've got it!

A microphone! That's what I thought! There's no doubt now: This Henri is the one we're after. Come on, not a moment to lose!

AND AFTER HAVING DISCONNECTED THE MICROPHONE, BLAKE IMMEDIATELY GETS IN TOUCH WITH THE DST, BUT...

... Say again? The Commissioner was summoned to the Interior Ministry? But this is a matter of minutes!!

Understood, Captain... I will attempt to contact him...! Yes... You can count on me!

FACED WITH THIS NEW SETBACK, BLAKE CANNOT HIDE HIS IMPATIENCE.

Damn! That's all I needed...! Having to wait, all the while...

OPENING THE FRONT DOOR A CRACK, HE STRAINS HIS EARS, BUT THE CLICKING OF THE TYPEWRITER HAS STOPPED...

Hmm...! I wonder what he could be doing...?

BLAKE WALKS TO THE WINDOW AND, LEANING OUTSIDE, STARES AS IF FASCINATED AT THE SQUARE OF LIGHT THAT IS THE NEIGHBOURING WINDOW. BELOW HIM, THE LARGE INNER COURTYARD, SLICK WITH RAIN, IS DESERTED...

It's not closed... Maybe I could try and make my way there...?

HIS MIND SUDDENLY MADE UP, HE SWINGS HIS LEG OVER THE BALCONY'S HANDRAIL...

What the heck! I'll risk it!

E.P. JACOBS 39

THIS DARING PLAN, MADE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT BY THE RAIN AND GUSTS OF WIND, PROVES RATHER PERILOUS. BUT BLAKE, HANGING ON TO THE EMBOSSING IN THE WALL, MANAGES TO REACH THE OTHER BALCONY SAFELY...

THIS DONE, HE CASTS A CAUTIOUS GLANCE INTO THE ROOM FROM WHICH COMES AN IRRITATED MONOLOGUE...

IT'S THE MYSTERIOUS "MONSIEUR HENRI" ON THE PHONE. SUDDENLY HE INTERJECTS IN A BITING TONE:

In short, he's outwitted you! Yet again!!

BLAKE STARTS...

That voice!?!

ENRAGED, THE MAN HAS SLAMMED THE HANDSET DOWN...

Blasted idiots, you'll regret it if... But...

CLAC

... AND JUMPING TO HIS FEET, HE OPENS A DRAWER AND PULLS OUT A LARGE MACHINE-PISTOL, WHICH HE IMMEDIATELY COCKS...

First, this...!

THEN, HIS BERETTA IN HAND, HE QUICKLY MOVES INTO THE HALL IN ORDER TO SCAN THE STAIRCASE.

BLAKE DOESN'T HESITATE AND PUSHES THE WINDOW OPEN TO COME INSIDE...

BUT HE ONLY HAS TIME TO JUMP BEHIND ONE OF THE CURTAINS, FOR HENRI IS ALREADY BACK!

Nothing suspicious... Besides, with the door left open, I won't have to fear any surprises...

HAVING LEFT HIS WEAPON NEAR AT HAND, THE MAN TRIGGERS THE OPENING MECHANISM OF A HIDDEN CLOSET...

And now, the documents!

... FROM WHICH HE PULLS OUT AN ARMFUL OF OBVIOUSLY COMPROMISING PAPERS THAT HE HASTILY THROWS INTO THE FIRE.

JUST THEN, A VIOLENT WIND BLOWS THE WINDOW WIDE OPEN.

Now what?!

HE RUSHES TO CLOSE IT...

Blast it! I could be seen from across the courtyard!

... AND, PULLING THE CURTAINS CLOSED, FINDS HIMSELF SUDDENLY FACE TO FACE WITH BLAKE, WHOSE RIGHT HAND, THRUST DEEP INSIDE HIS POCKET, HOLDS AN OBJECT, THE SHAPE OF WHICH HINTS AT A THREATENING GUN!

Hands up!

!?

40

E.P.J

COMPLETELY WRONG-FOOTED, "MONSIEUR HENRI" MEEKLY RAISES HIS HANDS.

Get back! Come on, faster!

What's te meaning of tis? What to you want...?

THE BANDIT, WHILE OBEYING, TRIES TO SIDLE CLOSER TO THE TABLE WHERE HE HAD LEFT THE MACHINE-PISTOL...

... BUT BLAKE, KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON HIM, READS HIS INTENTIONS...

None of that, old fellow! Steer well clear and put your back to the fire, please!

I to not unterstant!

AND HAVING STEPPED CLOSER AS HE SPEAKS, BLAKE DEFTLY GRABS THE WEAPON.

Phew! That's a relief!

What...? How so!?

Just so, dear fellow: I wasn't armed, and I was worried you'd realise I'd been threatening you with this!

What? A pipe...!?? Damnation! I've been duped!!

Perfect! I see that surprise made you drop that fake accent of yours... In addition, I think it's time that you also remove those ridiculous hairpieces...

AT THAT MOMENT, A STRANGE GLEAM COMES INTO THE MAN'S EYES, AND HE ANSWERS IN A CHANGED VOICE...

Er... Indeed, I believe so as well...

AND WITH A SWIFT GESTURE HE TEARS OFF HIS DISGUISE, REVEALING THE FACE OF THE FAMOUS OUTLAW, BLAKE AND MORTIMER'S SWORN ENEMY, "COLONEL" OLRIK!

Well, are you satisfied, Captain Blake...?

So it was really you! Do you always have to cross my path, then!?

Eh! What can I say, Captain... It's such a small world!

AND, LIKE AN ECHO, ANOTHER SNIGGER SOUNDS FROM BEHIND A STUNNED BLAKE...

Ha! Ha! Ha!

?

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

FREDDY AND SHARKEY HAVE COME IN QUIETLY AND ARE NOW TRAINING THEIR PISTOLS ON HIM.

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Come on, hand that toy over, pretty boy!

!

So, Blake, still glad that you found me?

KEEPING A STIFF UPPER LIP DESPITE THE SITUATION, THE CAPTAIN SAYS IN A SUBDUED VOICE...

Very well, you win!

41

E.P. Jacobs

BUT INSTEAD OF COMPLYING, BLAKE, IN A BLUR OF MOVEMENT, THROWS THE HEAVY MACHINE-PISTOL...

... AT SHARKEY'S HEAD, MAKING HIM STUMBLE FROM THE IMPACT!

OW!

THE BANDIT STAGGERS BACKWARDS AND BANGS AGAINST A LOW TABLE...

... WHICH TIPS OVER AND TRIPS HIM, MAKING HIM FALL HEAVILY TO THE FLOOR!

BOM

SEEING THIS, FREDDY DASHES FORWARD, AIMING AT BLAKE BUT UNWILLING TO SHOOT, FOR AT THE SAME INSTANT OLRIK, TOO, AFTER SEIZING A POKER FROM THE FIREPLACE, RUSHES TOWARDS THE CAPTAIN...

?

BUT WITH LIGHTNING SPEED, THE LATTER GRABS HIS ATTACKER'S ARM...

!?

... AND WITH A MIGHTY TWIST OF HIS BODY THROWS HIM OVER HIS SHOULDER...

... ONTO FREDDY, WHO IS HIT FULL IN THE CHEST AND DROPS HIS GUN.

OW

WHILE THE TWO MEN ROLL TO THE FLOOR, BLAKE DOESN'T WASTE A SECOND AND BOLTS TOWARDS THE FALLEN PISTOL...

BUT JUST AS HE TAKES IT IN HAND, THE LIGHT GOES OUT, AND SEVERAL SHOTS ARE FIRED...

BANG

BANG

!

... FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY THE SOUND OF THE DOOR BANGING CLOSED AND BEING LOCKED.

CLAC! CLIC!

DAMN!!

42

E.P JACOBS

UNDERSTANDING THAT HE'S BEEN TRAPPED INSIDE THE APARTMENT AND THAT THE THREE BANDITS ARE ABOUT TO GET AWAY FROM HIM, BLAKE THROWS HIMSELF AGAINST THE DOOR TO THE HALL...

BOM BOM

... IN WHICH FREDDY AND SHARKEY ARE HURRIEDLY REARMING THEMSELVES. OLRIK, FURIOUS, TURNS AROUND AND POINTS HIS SUBMACHINE GUN AT THE DOOR...

The Devil take you, Captain!

Let's take these "pineapples"!

Hurry up!

... AND OUR FRIEND BARELY HAS TIME TO JUMP ASIDE...

!

TAC TAC TAC

BUT FREDDY, WHO'S ALREADY OUT ON THE LANDING, LETS OUT A BITTER CRY...

Already!

!

Too late! The cops are coming!!!

INDEED, PRADIER AND HIS MEN, FOLLOWING THE SOUNDS OF GUNSHOTS, HAVE JUST SPILLED INTO THE ENTRANCE HALL AND ARE RUNNING TOWARDS THE STAIRCASE...

On the double, boys! Sounds like there's a war up there!

WITHOUT HESITATION, OLRIK LEADS HIS HENCHMEN TOWARDS THE UPPER FLOORS...

This way! I know a way out!

JUST IN TIME... A FEW SECONDS LATER, THE POLICE OFFICERS ARE ON THE LANDING...

The front door is open...? Careful!

Is someone locked inside the living room?!

BOM BOM

Who's there...?

BOM

JUST THEN, THE DOOR FINALLY BREAKS DOWN AND BLAKE APPEARS, GUN IN HAND...

PRADIER!?..

BLAKE!?..

CRAC

Did you see three armed men running away...?

No, we saw no one! We only heard gunshots, but...

That means they went up! Come on! I'll tell you everything that happened...

All right, let's go...

MEANWHILE, THE FUGITIVES HAVE ALREADY REACHED THE ROOF, SWEPT BY A TORRENTIAL RAIN...

This is going to be tight! In less than 10 minutes we'll have every copper in Paris on our heels! Our only way out of this is to make it to one of the buildings on Madame Street or Honoré Chevalier Street as quickly as possible. Let's go, and keep your eyes peeled!

OLRIK IS RIGHT, FOR WITHOUT WASTING A SECOND, BLAKE, PRADIER AND HIS MEN HAVE BOLTED UP THE STAIRS AND ARRIVED AT THE TOP FLOOR, WHERE THEY FIND AN OPEN ATTIC...

Over there!

Look! They reached the roof through this fanlight...

Let's follow the same path!

AND IN NO TIME...

There they are!

STOP!

!

THE GANGSTERS' ONLY ANSWER IS TO OPEN FIRE...

Surrender!

TAC TAC TAC TAC

BANG

... PROMPTLY ELICITING HEAVY RETURN FIRE...

BANG BANG BANG BANG

MAKING CLEVER USE OF THE DARKNESS AND THE LAY OF THIS STRANGE BATTLEFIELD, THE THREE MEN SLOWLY BACK TOWARDS THEIR GOAL, SHOOTING ALL THE WHILE...

BANG BANG BANG

BUT AS THEY ARE PROGRESSING ALONG A NARROW LEDGE, A TALL, SPIKED FENCE RISES BEFORE THEM, IMPASSABLE!

Hell!

?

BUT FREDDY EXCLAIMS...

There...! An iron ladder!

Saved!

DESPITE THE SLIPPERY SLATES, THE FUGITIVES QUICKLY MAKE IT TO THE LADDER'S FOOT...

You, keep them at a distance... Once we're up there, we'll cover you in turn!

Okay, boss!

UPON SEEING THE BANDITS STARTING TO CLIMB, PRADIER, AFRAID TO LOSE THEM, STANDS UP AND SHOUTS...

Blast! They're going to get away! FORWARD!!!

Be careful, old boy!

BUT SHARKEY, CROUCHING IN THE SHADOWS AND HOLDING A PRIMED GRENADE, IS WAITING IN AMBUSH FOR THE POLICEMEN TO COME NEAR...

Ha! Ha! Ha!

AND SUDDENLY...

Take that, you clowns!

BOOM

© P Jacobs '44

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSION, SHARKEY HURRIES UP THE LADDER...

BUT AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE IS WAITING FOR HIM: HIS ACCOMPLICES, STUNNED, HAVE JUST DISCOVERED THAT THEY ARE BLOCKED BY A VERITABLE ABYSS...

It's impassable!

Like rats in a trap!

Hell!

IN THE MEANTIME, THE POLICEMEN HAVE REGROUPED...

What ho, Pradier! Nothing missing?

No, but I've got two men injured! It's a good thing you had the presence of mind to kick the grenade away!

Just a stroke of luck. But what do we do now?

These rascals are simply too tough! I'll ask for reinforcements and projec...

BUT BLAKE HAS GRABBED HIS ARM...

Look! They seem to be stuck on their perch!

Good grief! It's true! We have them, and...

!

OUCH!

BUT PRADIER CANNOT FINISH HIS SENTENCE, FOR A FRIGHTFUL DOWNPOUR STRIKES WITH INCREDIBLE SUDDENNESS, HURLING MASSIVE HAILSTONES. SLATES AND WINDOWS EXPLODE INTO SHARDS, WHILE THE POLICEMEN SCATTER HURRIEDLY...

AS FOR THE THREE BANDITS, THEIR SITUATION IS EVEN WORSE. KNOCKED HALFWAY TO UNCONSCIOUSNESS, THEY BARELY HAVE TIME TO GRAB ONTO A TV MAST...

TONG

?

WITHOUT WARNING, ONE OF THE CABLES SNAPS, AND THE SHOCK IS SO VIOLENT THAT THE MAST BENDS INSTANTLY, DRAGGING OLRIK OVER EMPTY SPACE.

!

BY SHEER CHANCE, THE LONG ALUMINIUM POLE GETS CAUGHT BETWEEN THE CHIMNEYS OF THE OPPOSITE ROOF...

DZING

OLRIK, WHO'S MANAGED TO HOLD ON, SLIDES DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE MAST AND SETS FOOT ON THE BUILDING...

HE IMMEDIATELY SHOUTS TO HIS HENCHMEN...

QUICK! DO WHAT I DID OR YOU'RE DONE FOR!

JUMPING AT THIS MIRACULOUS CHANCE OF SALVATION, THE TWO MEN QUICKLY HEED HIS ADVICE AND FOLLOW IN HIS TRACKS ACROSS THE FRAGILE BRIDGE.

THE SQUALL SPENT, BLAKE AND PRADIER ARE LEFT TO ADMIT THEIR FAILURE...

Too late!

Yes, this cursed storm saved them!

E.P. JACOBS 45

A FEW HOURS LATER, WHILE THE PRESS COMMENTS ON THE EVENING'S PECULIAR EVENTS...

Get the details on the giant hailstones! Damage all over France!!

Dramatic manhunt on the roofs of Paris!

BACK AT THE DST, BLAKE AND PRADIER HAVE BEEN JOINED BY PROFESSOR LABROUSSE, UNHARMED AFTER HIS HAZARDOUS ADVENTURE...

I hope you will forgive me, my friend, for harassing you after the unpleasant times you have just been through, but what we have to deal with simply cannot wait...

I understand... How can I help...?

We have managed to recover, in the fireplace of your ex-neighbour from Vaugirard Street, a piece of paper almost three-quarters burnt. Our specialists have succeeded in reconstructing the text. I must confess, I do not understand a thing... Yet I do believe that once again this is a meteorological message... But see for yourself...

INDEED, AS IN THE PREVIOUS MESSAGE, A LONG SERIES OF NUMBERS IN SEPARATE GROUPS IS DISPLAYED...

xxx 141
13 10 002
07
90 000
90 474
10 310
4- 0--
10 400

... AND HARDLY HAS THE PROFESSOR CAST A GLANCE AT IT WHEN HE CRIES OUT...

Blimey! This isn't reassuring at all!

So...!?

Well, as you guessed, this is a weather forecast for the 13th! And if I'm interpreting the code correctly, on that day an exceptionally dense fog should cover the entire country... and could even spread to neighbouring countries!

Well, well... How strange...

Why strange?

Have you considered that such a fog would in effect mean the total paralysis of internal communications, isolating every region, town or village...? In other words, ideal conditions for...

... a surprise attack!?! Good Lord! That could explain the unusual combined manoeuvres currently being held across the border...! We have to warn SHAPE immediately!

So we only have 48 hours left to make preparations, and that when we've lost track of Olrik!

We still have an ace... Mortimer!

Mortimer...? But he's vanished to who knows where!

Who knows where? Let's see about that!

Remember Olrik's insistence in steering us away from the "Trou salé." It leads me to conclude that Mortimer must be somewhere in that area!

And what should I do...?

Good thinking! Let's go!

You, Professor, should head back to the Quai Branly and put your people on alert. And now, gentlemen, to work! We have a tough job ahead of us!

MEANWHILE, SOME 12 MILES FROM SAUSSAIES STREET AS THE CROW FLIES, OLRIK'S MEN ARE LISTENING TO THE LATEST NEWS ON THE RADIO, AND SMIRKING...

... As we just heard from this quick review of headlines, tonight's flash storm has caused a nationwide disaster!

This just in: Police headquarters are asking us to broadcast the description of three gangsters who took part in the Vaugirard street shootout. One Olrik, known as "the Colonel," six feet, black hair, hooked nose, small black moustache. Sharkey, aka "the gorilla," massive lout with a brutish face, prominent cheekbones...

Hey, boys, listen to that!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

Huh!? What? What did he say?!! A massive lout... me? ME!?!

STUNG BY THE JEERING OF HIS COMPANIONS, SHARKEY JUMPS TO HIS FEET. BUT AT THAT INSTANT, A SHARP VOICE SILENCES THE BANDITS' HILARITY AT ONCE...

Shut up, all of you!

!?

And you, Sharkey, bring me the professor!

Er... Okay, boss!

MOMENTS LATER, SHARKEY EXITS THE CASTLE, STILL FURIOUS AND GRUMBLING...

Bunch of idiots... I'll make them pay!

... AND HEADS TOWARDS THE BUILDINGS OF THE OLD FACTORY, WHICH ARE DRAPED IN SHADOWS. AS HE NEARS THE WAREHOUSES, A SILHOUETTE ARMED WITH A SUBMACHINE GUN APPEARS SUDDENLY...

Don't you worry, tiny, it's Sharkey!

Who goes there!?!

Hey, Max! I've come to get hairy face!

This way, your lordship...

A CLICK, AND A LIGHT BULB COMES ON, REVEALING THE CRUMBLING WALLS OF AN ABANDONED STABLE.

The customer's not too rowdy?

Of course not! I run a perfectly quiet hotel!

BEYOND THE DOOR, RICKETY STAIRS LEAD DOWN TO A NARROW AND DAMP CORRIDOR FROM WHICH OPENS THE PROFESSOR'S CELL...

Damn! Stinks in here...!

Really? That's funny; no one's ever complained!

HAVING THROWN THE HEAVY DOOR OPEN, THE JAILOR POINTS HIS TORCH TOWARDS THE BACK OF THE ROOM...

A visitor for the professor!

What? We don't recognise our old buddies? (1)

IN THE BEAM APPEARS OUR UNFORTUNATE FRIEND MORTIMER, PROPERLY MANACLED...

Would the honourable professor do me the extreme kindness of following me? One of his dearest friends is asking for him...!

?

WITHOUT A WORD, MORTIMER STANDS UP AND STARTS WALKING...

Don't you go misplace him, now...

Don't you worry, sonny. I'll keep an eye on him!

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER...

COME IN!

It's me!

KNOCK KNOCK

MORTIMER HAS BARELY TAKEN A SINGLE STEP INTO THE ROOM WHEN HE EXCLAIMS, FLABBERGASTED:

OLRIK!!!

47

E. P. JACOBS

(1) SEE THE MYSTERY OF THE GREAT PYRAMID.

AT MORTIMER'S CRY, OLRIK, LOUNGING NONCHALANTLY ON A COMFORTABLE COUCH, ANSWERS MOCKINGLY...

Yes, yes, my dear Professor, it is indeed I, and as you can see for yourself, I came out of all my adventures fresh as a rose... and in perfect health.

Of course, I should have expected to find you in the middle of this shady business!

Just like I was bound to find you in my path, nosier than ever, and with your old buddy Francis Blake the super-cop inevitably by your side!

... But enough flattery... What drove you to once again stick your nose into my business, hmm? Does my "Meteor" offensive bother you so much?

What? Those showers you create with such difficulty, and which you would be hard-pressed to stop in any case...?

You amuse me, Mortimer, when you try to make me believe that it is for some simple atmospheric perturbations that the good Labrousse asked you to come, and that the DST and MI5 marshalled their forces... Not to mention that my showers, as you call them, are doing some serious damage, don't you think?

MORTIMER, WHO IS PLANNING SOMETHING, MAKES A SHOW OF INCREDULITY...

You're just bluffing! All this is merely coincidence. These phenomena are actually natural. We're not interested in your witch-doctor tricks, but in your activity as a spy...

BUT OLRIK IS NOT FOOLED BY THE RUSE...

Well played, Professor—but don't try to pull the wool over my eyes! You're trying to provoke me into spilling the beans, aren't you? Well, don't bother, I'm going to tell you the whole story, from A to Z!

Er... You're too kind!

OLRIK PUSHES A BUTTON AND ADDS, WITH A SINISTER SMILE...

Don't thank me... You cannot refuse anything to a man who's not long for this world. Hello?

Sadi...? We're on our way... Tell Milosh!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, OLRIK AND MORTIMER, ESCORTED BY SHARKEY, ARRIVE AT A SORT OF GUARDROOM WHERE ARMED MEN ARE ON DUTY...

Well?

It's okay, boss, he's expecting you!

AFTER GOING THROUGH A SUCCESSION OF DARK AND DIRTY WORKSHOPS AND HALLWAYS, LITTERED WITH MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS HAPHAZARDLY STREWN AROUND...

... THE THREE MEN HEAD DOWN A METAL STAIRCASE...

... BEFORE STOPPING IN FRONT OF A PILE OF EMPTY BARRELS...

Look closely, Professor...

NO SOONER HAS OLRIK TURNED A LONG SPIKE SET IN THE WALL THAN A WHOLE SECTION OF THE FLOOR SWINGS UP, REVEALING A LARGE OPENING.

?!

INSIDE THE NEWLY OPENED PASSAGE, MORTIMER MAKES OUT THE BEGINNING OF CONCRETE STAIRS...

Please, do go on down, my dear Professor...

THE STAIRCASE DESCENDS DEEP INTO A KIND OF BUNKER, ITS NEATNESS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE MESS ON THE SURFACE.

?

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STEPS, SILENT, STANDS A MYSTERIOUS-LOOKING CHARACTER...

Professor Milosh Georgevich, allow me to introduce a notable guest: Professor Mortimer of London... who will be staying at the castle for a very short time, alas!

I'm honoured, dear colleague. I know your work.

Oh!? Really?

However, I believe I should tell you that Professor Mortimer is filled with insulting doubts about our scientific power.

Nothing will be simpler than sweeping them away...

That's what you say, and I'm warning you...

BUT PROFESSOR MILOSH HAS GRABBED THE HANDLE OF A STEEL DOOR...

It's not just words, Professor. Come!

ALL OF A SUDDEN, A VAST BUZZING ROOM OPENS BEFORE A STUNNED MORTIMER, FILLED WITH A STRONG SMELL OF OZONE, ITS WALLS GLITTERING WITH A THOUSAND MULTICOLOURED LIGHTS...

!?

My dear colleague, you are looking at the command centre for one of the many meteorological stations of the "Cirrus" network: an uninterrupted chain of relay-stations built in carefully chosen locations, which create the weather we want, when we want, over immense areas of Western Europe!... The station you are in, and which I have the honour of commanding, is the most important of all because of its particularly "strategic" situation!

MORTIMER ANSWERS THESE WORDS WITH FEELING...

Come on, Professor Milosh, you're not going to pretend that you can modify the weather at will. Especially when everyone knows that to this day, and despite a hundred different theories, we do not even understand <u>WHY IT RAINS</u>!?

PROFESSOR MILOSH COUNTERS WITH A SUPERIOR SMILE...

My dear colleague, speak for "your" meteorological science. "Ours" is more advanced, as I will demonstrate right away. This way, please...

A MINUTE LATER, MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF WITH OLRIK, SHARKEY AND MILOSH IN THE LATTER'S OFFICE...

You'll forgive me if I don't have these uncomfortable bracelets removed... but I was told you're a rather... dangerous man...!

Oh, someone's exaggerated quite a lot! But don't apologise. I'm listening!

THEN, LIKE A TEACHER SPEAKING TO HIS STUDENT, THE STRANGE SCIENTIST BEGINS HIS LECTURE...

As I told you a minute ago, 001—this very station—is especially important, for it is a **pilot-station**, whose task it is to receive, coordinate and send to the **relay-stations** the orders and data coming from XXX1, the **central-station**, which is buried under the ice of the North Pole!

ON THE LAST WORDS, MORTIMER BURSTS OUT...

Come, now! This is pure science fiction you're blabbering about...! No one ever...

One moment! Do not proffer hasty judgements, Professor...! Take a look at this map instead...

This is the aforementioned Central Station... and this is the position of the **polar fronts**, where, as you must know, are born most of the meteorological phenomena that determine the weather over the temperate zone of Western Europe and the United States. But, thanks to our favourable geographical location, our interplanetary explorations, and of course our prodigious scientific lead, we succeeded in unravelling the secret of the **general circulation of the atmosphere**. Thanks to that, we can control almost the entirety of the **Atlantic and Pacific polar fronts**...

Equipped with an impressive array of electronic equipment—including electronic computers, radars and other absolutely revolutionary devices—XXX1 detects, analyses, interprets, predicts, directs or deviates at its will all perturbations born within its operating range...

This, if I understand you correctly, with the help of the other **relay-stations**, working within their own sphere of activity, but along a general plan decided at the **top**?

Exactly! Which, of course, does not prevent them from taking initiatives and intervening at the local level if needed, by creating storms, rainfall or any other phenomena...

So you might truly be able to command the elements...!? I cannot believe you!

And yet, my dear colleague, while you're still busy with such childishness as seeding the clouds with carbon dioxide and silver iodide, or piercing storms with cannon fire, we are able to recreate at will and artificially most natural phenomena!

Thus, for example, we capture a storm front by creating a powerful **magnetic field** that acts upon it like a magnet upon a pin... We provoke torrential rain by breaking the **molecular balance** of the clouds, the same clouds that we will later rebuild with the help of **artificial uplifts**... We create or dissipate fog in the area of our choosing by simply heating or cooling certain layers of air... It's quite simple!

BEWILDERED BY EVERYTHING HE'S JUST HEARD, MORTIMER CAN ONLY STUTTER...

But... the tremendous energy needed for such an endeavour, where do you get it!?!

Milosh's only answer is to smile and press a button...

... WHICH IMMEDIATELY CAUSES THE WALL TO SPLIT DOWN ITS MIDDLE AND SLIDE OPEN, FILLING THE OFFICE WITH A BRIGHT GREENISH GLOW!

?

THROUGH THE OPENING, A STARTLED MORTIMER SEES A WIDE CORRIDOR WITH PLEXIGLAS WALLS...

Please, my dear colleague, this way...

AS IN A DREAM, THE PROFESSOR FOLLOWS MILOSH AND DISCOVERS THAT THEY ARE IN A GALLERY OVERLOOKING A COLOSSAL HALL...

While the equipment is in use, it is necessary to wear dark glasses here, and protective clothing down there...

... WHERE FABULOUS MACHINES ARE LINED UP IN AN EERIE LIGHT, LIKE SO MANY GLISTENING MONSTERS...

... PROFESSOR MILOSH HAS STOPPED IN FRONT OF A LARGE COMMAND PANEL, AND, WITH A SWEEPING GESTURE ENCOMPASSING THE ENTIRE HALL, SAYS...

Here is the source of this energy you are so curious about, my dear colleague. And this energy is none other than **ball lightning!**

BALL LIGHTNING!?!

Yes, the old dream of the famous physicist **Planté**, who saw in artificially produced ball lightning the accumulator of tomorrow, has now come true... The lightning, composed of a mix of oxygen and nitrogen compressed by a powerful electrical arc, has a significant internal temperature and holds within a negligible volume an energy of some **20 billion joules!**

Incredible!!!

Captured at its source, the lightning is stored in a special type of accumulator and is then ready to power either the batteries of our **ultra-short-wave bazookas** directly, or, after passing through a rotary converter, our **various emitters**...

I hope you understand now that creating **thermal uplifts**, increasing the magnetic field of an area or influencing the electrostatics of the atmosphere is as simple for us as building an atomic bomb!

I see...! And to think that there are some specialists on our side who are still dismissing the very existence of the phenomenon...!?

BUT WHILE GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS HANGING ON HIS INTERLOCUTOR'S EVERY WORD, MORTIMER IS STUDYING THE CONTROL PANEL CAREFULLY...

... AND ASKS SUDDENLY...

Er... That... This isolated black switch, there... What's it for?

MILOSH, TAKEN OFF-BALANCE, STAMMERS EMBARRASSEDLY...

Oh! This switch...? A...

BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO FINISH, FOR A NEWCOMER, ARRIVED WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING, CUTS HIM OFF HARSHLY!

ENOUGH!!!

E.P. JACOBS

WHILE EVERYONE REMAINS FROZEN IN EMBARRASSED SILENCE, THE MAN CONTINUES ICILY.

Professor Milosh Georgevich, I believe you talk too much, and you, Colonel, are quite careless...

WORRIED, MILOSH STAMMERS...

But, General... There is no risk here... These data are purely theoretical... and in any case, Professor Mortimer wouldn't be able to use it, since Colonel Olrik...

OLRIK IMMEDIATELY BREAKS IN...

Indeed, General, he'll be in no danger of blabbing, since he'll be dispatched as soon as we leave here...! What we have offered him is similar to the last cigarette of a condemned man... As for giving us the slip, I'd like to see him try... See, I have the key to his handcuffs and...

BUT THE GENERAL CUTS HIM OFF DRYLY...

It is out of the question that this man be dispatched. Your personal vendettas are none of our concern. The professor is "ours." There are still many great things to be done; we need scientists, and especially this one!

LOSING ALL SELF CONTROL, OLRIK SHOOTS BACK...

But this spy is mine, and I...

Enough, Colonel! Give these keys to Professor Milosh, who will answer for the prisoner's life with his own... That's an order!

FURIOUS, OLRIK HAS OBEYED, BUT AS MORTIMER IS TAKEN AWAY, HE GRUMBLES...

Yes, sir, General, sir... But I'm afraid "your" scientist won't serve you for very long...

Take him to section D...

A SHORT WHILE LATER, MORTIMER, ESCORTED BY TWO OF MILOSH'S MEN, IS LOCKED UP INSIDE A SMALL ROOM NEAR THE CONTROL ROOM...

WHILE THESE EVENTS ARE UNFOLDING, BLAKE AND PRADIER HAVE NOT REMAINED IDLE. ALL THROUGH THE 12TH AND THE FOLLOWING NIGHT, THEY HAVE INVESTIGATED THE PROFESSOR'S DISAPPEARANCE, AND WE CATCH UP WITH THEM ON SAUSSAIES STREET, BACK FROM THEIR EXPEDITION AT THE "TROU SALÉ," EMPTY-HANDED AND EXHAUSTED... WE ARE NOW ON THE DAY WHEN SHOULD TAKE PLACE, ACCORDING TO THE MESSAGE DECIPHERED BY LABROUSSE, THE SURPRISE ATTACK FORESHADOWED BY THE MYSTERIOUS TROOP MOVEMENTS OVER THE BORDER.

I don't understand...! Mortimer's last words were: "I'm going to go have a look at the lake of Trou Salé"... But that lake is right next to the airfield! How could anything out of the ordinary take place there...?

Still, I continue to believe that what he was looking for must be situated in an area delimited by the lakes of La Geneste, Loges-en-Josas... and this lake of Trou Salé... But that doesn't tell us what happened to him...

MEANWHILE, IN A CORNER OF THE OFFICE, INSPECTOR RAMON AND TWO OF HIS COLLEAGUES ARE STILL PORING STUBBORNLY OVER THE LOCAL MAP OF THE BUC AREA...

Let's see... Farm of the Gate of Les Loges... the Copse of Les Loges... La Gérinière... the park of Buc... the Castle of Troussalet...

AT THESE WORDS, BLAKE JUMPS...

What!?! ... The Castle of Trou Salé?!

How did you pronounce it?

Like it's spelled... Troussalet... Castle of Troussalet.

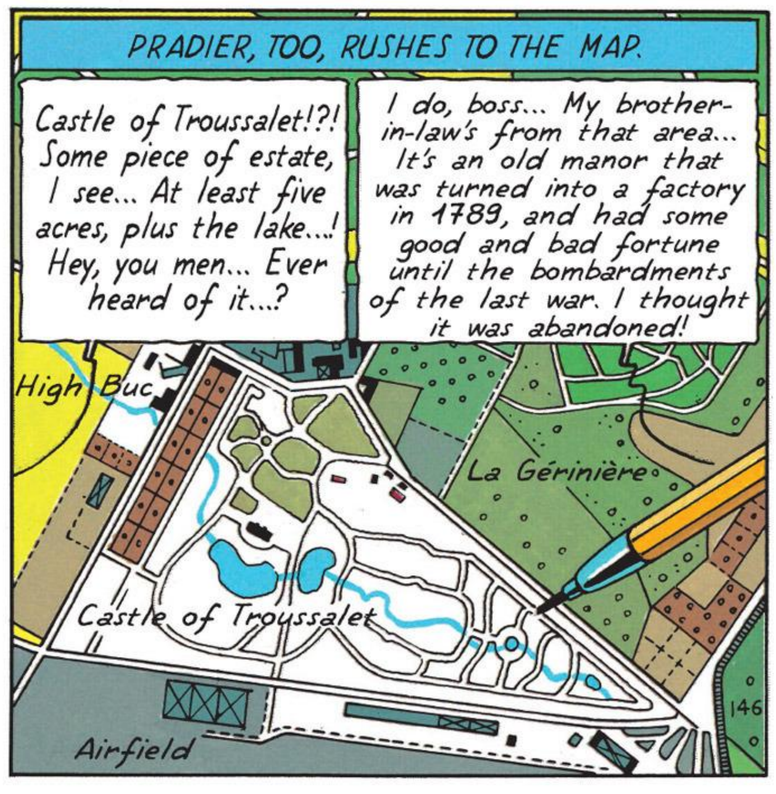
By Jove, Pradier! It's all clear now!!... All Mortimer had taken to assist in his search was a simple roadmap—which, as a result, could not have mentioned the name of this castle. He likely asked someone, and like any good Englishman, understood "Trou Salé" for Troussalet... Which means we were sent on the wrong trail!!!

Blast!

PRADIER, TOO, RUSHES TO THE MAP.

Castle of Troussalet!?! Some piece of estate, I see... At least five acres, plus the lake...! Hey, you men... Ever heard of it...?

I do, boss... My brother-in-law's from that area... It's an old manor that was turned into a factory in 1789, and had some good and bad fortune until the bombardments of the last war. I thought it was abandoned!



An abandoned estate. That would make an excellent hideaway...! As well as an excellent strategic spot for a parachute drop! See, bordering the airfield of Toussus-le-Noble...! Just over a mile from the Satory Base...! Two from the airfield at Villacoublay...! Two and a half from the Atomic Centre at Saclay...! Six from the SHAPE, the nerve centre of the Atlantic Alliance...! As for Orly...

BUT PRADIER MOTIONS FOR HIM TO STOP...

No need! I get the idea... Ramon, quick! Call the CRS!

E.P. JACOBS

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THE NEXT MINUTE, WHILE THE RADIO IS BROADCASTING THE ALARM TO THE MOST THREATENED OBJECTIVES...

Hello! Hello! DST to SHAPE...! I repeat: possible airborne attack. Take all necessary dispositions! Over...

Hello! Hello! Toussus-le-Noble Airfield! I repeat: possible airborne attack...!

Hello! Hello! Satory Base! I repeat: possible airborne attack! Take your dispositions...!

Hello! Hello! Saclay Atomic Centre...! I repeat: possible airborne attack... Take your dispositions!

AT THE CRS HEADQUARTERS, EVERYTHING IS GOING INTO MOTION...

Is it clear then? We have to surround the castle but without attracting any attention! Block the N838, the D117 and the D91, as well as the road to La Geneste... An officer will await Commissioner Pradier's arrival near the Arcades...

Understood, Colonel!

UNFORTUNATELY, OUR FRIENDS COULDN'T GUESS THAT AN HOUR EARLIER, WHILE THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY BACK FROM THE TROU SALÉ, DEEP WITHIN THE MYSTERIOUS STATION 001, PROFESSOR MILOSH WAS RECEIVING THE ORDER TO ACT...

Professor Milosh Georgevich, the time has come...! Proceed!!!

Right away, General!

IMMEDIATELY...

Attention! Attention! Get ready...! Everyone to their stations...! Sentries, put your masks on!

AND, SLOWLY, THE PROFESSOR BEGINS TO COUNT DOWN THE LAST SECONDS...

5... 4... 3... 2... 1... 0!!!

... THEN, WITH A FIRM GESTURE, HE PRESSES A BUTTON!

IMMEDIATELY, STRANGE DEVICES APPEAR, TRAINED ONTO THE SKY, SPRINGING UP FROM UNDER CAMOUFLAGE NETS...

BUT NONE OF THAT HAS MANAGED TO DIVERT OLRIK FROM HIS PERSONAL GOALS, FOR AT THE SAME MOMENT...

So?

It's all set, boss! Milosh's two men became amenable to the merry jingling of our arguments...! Their boss will be too busy during the next hours to worry about his "guest." So, during Beardy's next meal, it'll be easy for us to...

... to season his dish with... this! That's perfect! I will trust in your skill, Sadi!

Don't worry, boss... I've got a score to settle with that guy!

BUT LET US LEAVE OLRIK TO HIS DARK SCHEMES, AND GO BACK TO PARIS WHERE DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER PRADIER AND CAPTAIN BLAKE ARE GETTING READY TO LEAVE THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE DST, SAUSSAIES STREET...

As well as the inspectors, and to be on the safe side, I requested that a CRS unit be waiting for us at the Gate of Saint-Cloud.

All right, boys, let's go!

BUT PRADIER STOPS DEAD ON THE DOORSTEP...

My God, Blake, look at that!!!

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E.P. JACOBS

OUTSIDE, A STRANGE AND ALARMING SIGHT, A BANK OF YELLOW FOG, THICKER BY THE MINUTE, IS SLOWLY SETTING DOWN ON THE CITY...

The fog Professor Labrousse told us about! There's no doubt then: It's for today!

Yes! Quickly, let's go before it's too late!

PRADIER, BLAKE AND THE INSPECTORS PILE INTO THE CARS AND DRIVE OFF AT TOP SPEED...

Vidal, old boy, close the window. That horrible fog is getting inside!

LEANING OVER THE WHEEL, VIDAL GOES DOWN THE AVENUE OF MARIGNY ONTO THE CHAMPS-ELYSÉES ROUNDABOUT, FLIES ALONG THE GRAND-PALAIS AND FINALLY REACHES THE SEINE, HAVING FLIRTED WITH DISASTER 20 TIMES ALONG THE WAY—DISASTER AVOIDED THANKS TO HIS MASTERFUL HANDLING OF THE CAR AND HIS IN-DEPTH KNOWLEDGE OF PARIS'S STREETS...

Say, Pradier, have you noticed the strange expression on all these people...?

I was about to ask you the same! They're all laughing their heads off! I'll be... Look at that...!

INDEED, ALL ALONG THE WAY, PASSERSBY ARE BEHAVING ERRATICALLY, LOOKING BOTH MERRY AND CONFUSED...

Hoo! Hoo!

LOTERIE NATIONALE

SUDDENLY, A COURIER FROM THE BANQUE DE FRANCE CROSSES THE STREET WITHOUT WARNING, GESTICULATING...

He! He! He! Good day, gentlemen...!

EEEEEEEE

That idiot almost made us skid off the street!

AS THEY START ALONG THE PASSY QUAY, A BUS APPEARS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM—IN A ONE-WAY STREET...

A DESPERATE MANOEUVRE THROWS THEM ONTO THE PAVEMENT AT THE LAST SECOND, WHILE THE HUGE VEHICLE FILLED WITH SCREAMING PEOPLE DRIVES ON, ZIGZAGGING...

Blimey! But they're all bonkers!

He! He! He!

Ho! Ho! Ho!

AT THAT MOMENT THE RADIO COMES TO LIFE...

Hello! Hello! Central to Commissioner Pradier...! Urgent and serious warning from Professor Labrousse...! The current fog is toxic, because of the presence in its composition of an unknown element which has the ability to slowly absorb the nitrogen in the air. In so doing, it raises the proportion of oxygen to abnormal levels and thus causes a gradual increase in cardiac and cerebral activity. The unavoidable consequences if the phenomenon persists: After a phase of intense well-being and artificial euphoria, exaltation, delirium, madness and eventually, death! Over!!!

Damn! That explains it! Pradier, we have to immediately alert SHAPE and all the vital points of our defences. Moreover, we'll also have to find some masks, post-haste!!!!

For the masks, it'll be easy as long as the CRS are at the rendezvous point—they have some... As for SHAPE, I'm on it!

Go on, Vidal. And this time, don't worry about the damage!

Got it, boss!

AND WHILE THE RENAULT FRÉGATE DRIVES ON, PRADIER PLACES HIS CALL...

Hello! Hello! Commissioner Pradier to Central, all units on alert...

BUT WHEN, A FEW MINUTES LATER, THEY THUNDER UP TO THE GATE OF SAINT-CLOUD, THE POLICEMEN GAPE IN ASTONISHMENT AT THE SPECTACLE BEFORE THEM...

E.P. JACOBS

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE GATE OF SAINT-CLOUD, THE CRS BUS HAS BEEN ABANDONED BY ITS OCCUPANTS AFTER RAMMING A BIG VEGETABLE TRUCK, AND THE POLICEMEN ARE BUSY EXCHANGING INCOHERENT JOKES AND MANY A RIPE PROJECTILE, PLUCKED FROM THE SPILLED HORTICULTURAL CARGO.

BANG

Yippee!

Have some more!

Ho! Ho! Ho!

That's funny! This... er... I... Ha! Ha! Ha!

Quite right, Sergeant!

Tomatoes away!

PRADIER JUMPS OUT OF HIS CAR AND SHOUTS AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS...

Your masks...! You idiots...! Put your masks on!!!

BUT IT'S ALREADY TOO LATE, AND HIS CALL ISN'T EVEN HEARD! AT ONCE, TAKING CARE OF THE MOST URGENT FIRST, HE JUMPS INTO THE ABANDONED BUS...

Ah! There they are!

... AND HURRIEDLY COMES OUT WITH AN ARMFUL OF MASKS, ALREADY FEELING THE FIRST EFFECTS OF THE POISONED AIR!

There! These for us... and the rest for the guys in the second car!

Hey? What? Disappeared...? They've lost us!

Alas! They must have breathed this damned fog!

Of course...! Never mind! We'll do without them. Quickly! Let's put on these masks.

Right!

AN INSTANT LATER, THE CAR DIVES BACK INTO THE FOG...

... LEAVING THE CRS TO THEIR STRANGE EUPHORIA...

Have a nice trip! Hee! Hee!

MEANWHILE, AT THE HEART OF THE UNDERGROUND STATION, PROFESSOR MILOSH IS EXULTANT, FOR EVERYTHING IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN...

Yes, General, the operation is a complete success... Reports from the other stations all concur!

ENGROSSED IN HIS WORK, THOUGH, THE PROFESSOR DOESN'T KNOW THAT TWO OF HIS MEN, ASSIGNED TO GUARDING MORTIMER, ARE ABOUT TO BETRAY HIM... AT THAT VERY MOMENT, AS THEY ARE BRINGING OUR FRIEND HIS DINNER, THEY ARE STOPPED IN THE CORRIDOR BY SADI, OLRIK'S MINION...

Hep...! One minute, comrades!

DEFTLY, THE SCOUNDREL POURS A THIN POWDER INTO THE WINE CARAFE, SNIGGERING ALL THE WHILE...

There! Here's to your health, Professor!

CARRYING THE EVIL DRINK WITH THEM, THE TWO MEN KEEP WALKING WITHOUT A WORD, AND A SHORT WHILE LATER ENTER MORTIMER'S CELL...

BUT THEY HAVEN'T EVEN SET DOWN THE TRAY WHEN SEVERAL GUNSHOTS, FOLLOWED BY SHOUTING COMING FROM A NEARBY CORRIDOR, COMMAND THEIR ATTENTION...

? ? ? BANG BANG

THE TWO GUARDS DASH OUT OF THE CELL RIGHT AWAY, SLAMMING THE DOOR BEHIND THEM, BUT WITHOUT TAKING THE TIME TO LOCK IT.

Where did he go...!? This way, boss!

CLAC

E.P. Jacobs 55

AS THEY COME OUT INTO THE MAIN CORRIDOR, MILOSH'S MEN HAPPEN UPON OLRIK, FLANKED BY SHARKEY AND SADI...

Did you see anybody that way?

Sadi must have dreamed him!

Er... no!

I did not!

Enough! Let's go have a look at the other side! You two, go around through the main gallery. That way he won't have a chance to give us the slip!

NO SOONER HAVE HIS PURSUERS DISAPPEARED THAT A WILD-LOOKING CHARACTER BOLTS FROM A TOOL CLOSET IN THE CORRIDOR THE TWO GUARDS JUST LEFT, AND RUNS TO THE NEAREST DOOR...

Locked! Let's see the next one!

HE RUSHES TO THE SECOND ONE AND...

Saved!

WITHOUT HESITATION, THE FUGITIVE THROWS HIMSELF INSIDE AND SLAMS THE DOOR AFTER HIMSELF...

BUT HE IS DUMBSTRUCK, HIS BACK TO THE ENTRANCE, UPON SEEING MORTIMER...

YOU!?

YOU!?

THE MAN WHO HAS JUST UNTHINKINGLY LOCKED HIMSELF IN, IS NONE OTHER THAN ERNEST BRISSON, THE TAXI DRIVER WHO DISAPPEARED ON THE NIGHT THAT THIS INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE STARTED...

What? You're a prisoner too, sir...?

I'm afraid so! But yourself, where on earth did you come from...? I thought you'd drowned! What did happen to you?

WHILE THE TWO MEN HASTILY TELL EACH OTHER OF THEIR ADVENTURES, A FEW MILES AWAY, AND AFTER A THOUSAND DETOURS, THE DST'S FRÉGATE COMES TO A FINAL STOP...

Blast! That just takes the cake: out of gas, and the radio is dead! And right in the middle of this pea soup, too!!

Yes, it's enough to drive you to tears! Having overcome so many obstacles since we left Paris, and failing here, so close to our objective... Very well, let's continue on foot!

AND THE FOUR MEN, ALMOST BLIND, BEGIN FOLLOWING A BAD, RAIN-SOAKED COUNTRY ROAD...

THEY HAVE BEEN WALKING THUS FOR A GOOD 15 MINUTES WHEN PRADIER STOPS IN HIS TRACKS...

!

IN FRONT OF THEM STANDS A SIGN...

ACCESS PROHIBITED
SATORY
MILITARY BASE

Goodness! Talk about luck!

JUST THEN, SEVERAL FLASHES TEAR THROUGH THE FOG...

TAC
TAC
TAC

IT'S A SENTRY WHO, TAKING THEM FOR MEMBERS OF SOME 5TH COLUMN, HAS OPENED FIRE ON THEM... BUT PRADIER HURRIEDLY LIFTS HIS ID.

?

Hey! Watch it! Police!!!

SOON AFTER, IN THE OFFICE OF ONE OF THE FEW OFFICERS STILL ABLE TO LISTEN TO THEM, PRADIER BRIEFLY RECOUNTS HIS MISSION'S OBJECTIVE...

And this is why it is vital that you provide us with some help... Our action may well make the difference between war and peace!

That's a terrible responsibility, Commissioner! We had to lock up three-quarters of our men... all completely insane! But I'll do my best!

AND 20 MINUTES LATER, THREE TANKS LENT TO THE DST ROLL SLOWLY OUT OF THE BASE AND TAKE THE DIRECTION OF HIGH BUC...

JACOBS

MEANWHILE, ERNEST IS BRINGING THE TALE OF HIS ODYSSEY TO A CLOSE...

But when I saw this blasted fog, I figured it wouldn't be good... I saw a door left ajar, I dove in. And just in time too—guys with gas masks were popping up left and right and...

Gas masks!? Are you sure...?

Ah, you can bet, I'm sure, sir! One of them folks even said: "These things are a real pain!"... and another one answered: "Just be patient, mate, the others will be here soon!"

The others!?!

IN A FLASH, MORTIMER UNDERSTANDS...

Blimey! It's clear... They've produced some diabolical fog which will allow the enemy paratroopers to operate completely unopposed...!

We've got to do something...! But what...!? We're down here, rotting in a cellar, while up there... Ah, it's stifling in here!!!

INSTINCTIVELY, MORTIMER PICKS UP THE CARAFE TO QUENCH HIS THIRST...

And to top it off, we have to drink their horrible wine again!

AT THESE WORDS, ERNEST CRIES OUT:

Don't drink that, sir! That wine's poisoned!!!

WHAT!?

Yes sir, just before I was seen, I had to hide to let three guys walk past, and they were chatting... "So, Sadi," said one of them, "how did the Professor like my wine?"... "Ah," the other answered, "with what I put in it, we'll never know!"... and with that they all burst out laughing... At the time of course, I didn't make much of it, but it's what you said about the wine that brought it back to mind!

I see... Another trick of that rascal Olrik! Oh! But... this is giving me an idea to get us out of here...! Yes, but still, what could I do afterwards, handcuffed as I am?!

I think there'd be some way to solve that problem, sir! The closet I hid in just before coming here was full of all kinds of tools! And I'm pretty sure I even saw a pair of bolt cutters that'll do the trick for us!

Perfect! In that case, listen carefully!

MEANWHILE, AT THE ENTRANCE OF SECTION D, MILOSH'S TWO GUARDS, BACK FROM THEIR VAIN HUNT, ARE BACK AT THEIR POST AND LISTENING FOR ANY SOUNDS COMING FROM THE PROFESSOR'S CELL.

ALL OF A SUDDEN, TERRIFYING SCREAMS AND LOUD BANGING ON THE STEEL DOOR MAKE THEM JUMP!

HAAAAAAAAA!!!

It's started!

Sounds like it... Let's go!

THEY SPRINT DOWN THE CORRIDOR, AND IN NO TIME REACH THE DOOR AND THROW IT OPEN. RIGHT AWAY THEY SEE MORTIMER, APPARENTLY SUFFERING FROM THE EFFECTS OF POISONING...

AAAAAH!

ONE OF THE GUARDS BENDS DOWN...

I think he's done for... Hey, what the...!?

!?

WITHOUT WARNING, THE PROFESSOR HAS JUST GRABBED HIS ANKLES...

... AND, PUSHING HIM BRUTALLY OFF-BALANCE, RECEIVES HIM ON HIS RAISED FEET...

?

... BEFORE LAUNCHING HIM HEADFIRST ONTO THE FLOOR WITH A MIGHTY PUSH...

... KNOCKING HIM OUT FOR THE COUNT! BUT ALREADY THE OTHER GUARD IS RUSHING TOWARDS MORTIMER, TRUNCHEON HELD HIGH!!

BUT, FORTUNATELY FOR THE PROFESSOR, ERNEST EMERGES FROM THE SHADOWS WHERE HE WAS HIDDEN, HOLDING A HEAVY CRATE, AND...

Take that!

OW!

Nice work, Ernest! And now, to business! Go get your bolt cutter quickly while I strip these two!

Okay, sir!

TWO MINUTES LATER, ERNEST COMES BACK, TRIUMPHANTLY HOLDING UP AN ENORMOUS PAIR OF BOLT CUTTERS...

There you go, sir!

Wonderful! Quick, cut these off!

FOR THE DRIVER, FREEING MORTIMER IS A MATTER OF MERE SECONDS.

By Jove! Such dexterity! Congratulations!

Bah, sir, I don't want to brag, but I know my way around tools!

And now, "boss," what do we do?

We put on their equipment and leave this place quickly. The first part of our plan succeeded, but the hardest is still ahead of us!

No one... All clear!

FIVE MINUTES LATER, THE TWO MEN, UNRECOGNISABLE UNDER THEIR DISGUISE, EXIT SECTION C.

MORTIMER EASILY FINDS HIS MARKS, AND SOON AFTER THEY SAFELY REACH THE BUSY CONTROL ROOM...

... AND ENTER MILOSH'S OFFICE. IT IS EMPTY, BUT THE WALL IS OPEN.

He must be in the gallery over the great hall of accumulators...

INDEED, MILOSH IS SITTING AT THE BIG CONTROL PANEL. BUT THE LADDER HATCH IS OPEN, MASKING THE TWO MEN FROM VIEW AS THEY APPROACH SILENTLY.

SUDDENLY, MILOSH WHIRLS AROUND, FURIOUS...

What on earth are you doing here? Get out of...

BUT HE FALLS SILENT, STUNNED— THE BARREL OF A SUBMACHINE GUN IS POINTING STRAIGHT AT HIM, WHILE TWO EYES ARE STARING AT HIM HARSHLY THROUGH THE EYEPIECE OF THE HOOD...

What is the meaning of this?! Are you mad!?!

Less than you think, Professor! Ernest, stand behind him and make sure he stays quiet!

Got it, sir!

AND WHILE THE ASTONISHED MILOSH IS FIRMLY HELD DOWN ON HIS SEAT, MORTIMER LIFTS HIS HOOD...

What!?! You!!! What... what do you want from me...??

Just a little technical discussion, my dear colleague... Speaking of which, how do you stop this infernal contraption?

HEARING THIS, MILOSH REGAINS HIS COMPOSURE AND, WITH A CUNNING SMILE AND MOCKING TONE, SAYS:

Since you're such a talented and illustrious character, why don't you work it out, my dear Professor?

Watch it, Milosh! We're not here to play guessing games...! Answer me quickly, or...

AT THE SAME INSTANT, OLRIK'S BELLOWING VOICE COMES OUT OF THE SPEAKER...

Hello! Hello! Be careful, Milosh! Mortimer's escaped!!!

AND BEFORE HE CAN BE PREVENTED, MILOSH SHOUTS AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS...

They're here in the gallery! Help!!!

58

E. P. JACOBS

KNOWING THEN THAT IT IS TOO LATE TO TRY AND CONVINCE MILOSH TO TALK, MORTIMER SAYS:

The office door is locked. That should give us a few minutes. I'll try and stop this thing... You take the gun and shoot the first man who shows his face...

Right, sir!

?!

AND UNDER MILOSH'S HALF-SARCASTIC, HALF-WORRIED GAZE, THE PROFESSOR GETS TO WORK.

Damn! Not one clear label in sight...! I'll try to locate the main switch...

IN THE MEANTIME, OLRIK AND HIS MEN HAVE ARRIVED AND FIND THEIR WAY BLOCKED BY THE OFFICE DOOR.

It's no use, boss. The door is locked from the inside, and...

Damnation! We need jigsaws! Blowtorches! Quickly!

WITHOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO THE THREATENING SOUNDS COMING FROM OUTSIDE, MORTIMER CONTINUES HIS METHODICAL STUDY OF THE CONSOLE. UNFORTUNATELY, THE UNUSUAL TYPE OF THIS ONE IS PROVING TAXING EVEN FOR HIS SHREWD MIND...

Hell! There's not a single standard command here, and it's impossible to guess what they... Hey! Wait a minute...

... HE HAS JUST CAUGHT SIGHT OF THE BLACK BUTTON THAT HAD INTRIGUED HIM SO DURING HIS RECENT "GUIDED" TOUR.

It wouldn't, by any chance...? Let's see...

GUESSING HIS INTENTION, MILOSH, IGNORING THE WEAPON TRAINED UPON HIM, JUMPS TO HIS FEET AND HURLS HIMSELF AT MORTIMER, SCREAMING:

?!

Don't you touch that!!!

ERNEST HAS NO TIME TO INTERVENE, FOR AT THE SAME INSTANT THE OFFICE DOOR FINALLY YIELDS, AND...

Forward!

GLING

Keep them away!!

... OLRIK, FOLLOWED BY HIS MEN, APPEARS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE GALLERY...

!

?

AND WHILE MORTIMER STRUGGLES TO GET FREE, ERNEST DIVES BEHIND THE RAISED HATCH OF THE LADDER, SHOUTING...

I'll turn the first man to come any closer into Swiss cheese!

OLRIK'S ONLY ANSWER IS A BURST FROM HIS SUBMACHINE GUN...

Watch out for Milosh, boss!!

He doesn't matter!!

ERNEST RETURNS FIRE STRAIGHT AWAY, AND IN A SECOND THE WHOLE GALLERY IS ECHOING WITH THE DIN OF GUNSHOTS... WHILE THE BRAVE DRIVER ATTRACTS THE BANDITS' FIRE UPON HIMSELF...

DONG

TAC TAC

TAC

DONG

... MORTIMER FINALLY MANAGES TO FREE HIS RIGHT ARM, AND WITH A LIGHTNING HOOK, SENDS HIS OPPONENT TUMBLING ONTO THE CONTROL PANEL...

OW

... ONTO WHICH HE HOLDS HIM DOWN FIRMLY.

Help, Olrik! Help, you miserable cowards!

CLIC

BUT MILOSH IS STRUGGLING WILDLY, AND HIS HEAD SUDDENLY PRESSES ON THE MYSTERIOUS BLACK BUTTON...

... AND RIGHT THEN, THE TERRIFYING HOWLING OF A SIREN COVERS THE TUMULT, FREEZING THE HORRIFIED ADVERSARIES IN THEIR TRACKS...

WOOHOOHOOHOO

The "Black Protocol" has been started! Run away!!!

E.P. JACOBS

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MORTIMER HASN'T EVEN RELEASED MILOSH YET WHEN, WITHOUT A THOUGHT FOR THEIR ACCOMPLICE, OLRIK AND HIS MEN HAVE ALREADY RETREATED BEHIND THE WALL, WHICH CLOSES AFTER THEM...

WITH A MIGHTY EFFORT, MILOSH TEARS HIMSELF FROM MORTIMER'S GRASP AND RUNS DOWN THE GALLERY, SCREAMING, WHILE TWO ALARMED TECHNICIANS EMERGE FROM THE IRON LADDER'S HOLE...

?

Olrik! Don't leave me here! Open the door!

AT THAT MOMENT, A MASSIVE SERPENT OF FIRE, AFTER BURNING ITS ISOLATORS, STABS THROUGH THE PLEXIGLAS, MELTING IT INSTANTLY, AND STRIKES THE CONTROL PANEL, DESTROYING IT...

!

!

TURNING THEIR EYES TO THE GREAT HALL, OUR FRIENDS CANNOT SUPPRESS A CRY OF HORROR, FOR UNDER THE "BLACK PROTOCOL" THAT MILOSH HAS ACCIDENTALLY STARTED, STATION 001 HAS GONE INTO SELF-DESTRUCT MODE... MACHINES RUN WILD, AND WHILE THE ACCUMULATORS FURIOUSLY RELEASE THEIR TERRIFIC STORES OF ENERGY, THE GREAT GENERATOR, FUNCTIONING AT FULL CAPACITY, BEGINS PRODUCING EVEN MORE AT A TERRIFYING RATE!!!

Good Lord, sir! It's like Hell!

AS REMAINING IN THE CONTROL CABIN IS RAPIDLY BECOMING UNTENABLE, MORTIMER, WHO DOESN'T KNOW THE CAUSE OF THE DISASTER, LEADS ERNEST TOWARDS THE IRON LADDER, LEAVING MILOSH AND HIS PANIC-STRICKEN MEN IN THEIR DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO OPEN THE WALL TO THE OFFICE.

Let's go down into the hall! We might be able to cut the power lines and stop this devilry!

IN THE MEANTIME, THE BANDITS HAVE GONE THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR THAT CONNECTS THE OLD FACTORY AND THE SECRET STATION...

Hey, boss... What about the General?

To hell with stragglers! Block this!

BUT WHEN, AFTER REACHING THE TOP OF THE STAIRS, THEY'RE ABOUT TO LAUNCH THEMSELVES ACROSS THE PARK, THEY REALISE WITH TERROR THAT IT HAS BECOME THE SCENE OF AN ASTOUNDING SPECTACLE! A FORMIDABLE TORNADO HAS SWEPT THE YELLOW FOG AWAY, AND AS THE CONFOUNDED EMITTERS AND BAZOOKAS SEND RAYS AND PROJECTILES IN ALL DIRECTIONS, WHOLE SALVOES OF FIREBALLS STREAM UP INTO THE SKY.

BACKING OFF HURRIEDLY, FEELING THE GROUND SHAKE BENEATH THEIR FEET, AGHAST, THE MISERABLE OUTLAWS CLUSTER AROUND OLRIK, WHO GIBES THEM MERCILESSLY...

Good grief! Are you men or mice!?! There's no reason to panic. Take cover inside the old stables and stay there until the end of the fireworks! By then, our guys will have arrived! As for everything else, just trust me! I'll go have a look around...

BUT AS THEY STAMPEDE TOWARDS THE SHELTER LIKE A FRIGHTENED HERD, OLRIK HURRIEDLY WHISPERS INTO SADI'S EAR...

Bring the car out quickly! It's not the CRS roadblocks that'll stop us!

Got it, boss!

INDEED, UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE YELLOW FOG, THE CHECK-POINTS HAVE LONG SINCE BEEN ABANDONED. BUT AT THAT VERY INSTANT, THE TANKS FROM SATORY COME OUT OF THE ROAD TO LA GENESTE...

Tell me, Blake, is this the end of the world!?!

By Jove! It certainly looks like it!!!

CHEMIN DE LA GENESTE

60

AS FOR MORTIMER, WHO HAD HOPED HE COULD BRING A STOP TO THE GENERATOR'S FURIOUS MADNESS, HE QUICKLY REALISES THE VANITY OF HIS PROJECT. STILL, WHEN WE MEET HIM AGAIN, THE PROFESSOR IS BUSY ATTEMPTING ONE LAST MANOEUVRE: SHORT-CIRCUITING THE ACCUMULATORS, USING STEEL BARS.

THEN, SUDDENLY, ERNEST'S BREATHING APPARATUS GETS CAUGHT IN ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF AN INFRARED RAY EMITTER AND JAMS. THE UNFORTUNATE FAINTS AND COLLAPSES ALMOST INSTANTLY...

Ernest!!

THE PROFESSOR IMMEDIATELY HURRIES TO HIS HELP. UNFORTUNATELY, AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE EMITTER BEGINS TO RISE, OBEYING THE INCOHERENT ORDERS TRANSMITTED BY THE CONTROL PANEL, AND TAKES ERNEST WITH IT...

PANICKING, MORTIMER FEVERISHLY TRIES TO FREE HIM, BUT IN DOING SO IS ALSO CARRIED UP TOWARDS THE CEILING...

... INTO WHICH HE DISAPPEARS WITH HIS COMPANION, THROUGH A TRAP-DOOR THAT HAS JUST OPENED...

FINDING HIMSELF IN ABSOLUTE DARKNESS, MORTIMER IS WONDERING WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM WHEN A BRUTAL SHOCK MAKES HIM LOSE HIS HOLD AND TUMBLE TO THE GROUND, WHILE IN THE WALL A SLIT OPENS AND WIDENS RAPIDLY, LETTING THE LIGHT IN...

A cupola!!!

IT IS INDEED FROM INSIDE ONE OF THOSE CAMOUFLAGED SHELTERS FROM WHICH THE DEVICES ARE AIMED THAT MORTIMER HAS JUST EMERGED... HALF-STUNNED, HE LIFTS HIMSELF UP TO THE OPENING AND REMAINS FROZEN IN STUPEFACTION...

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARK DEVASTATED BY THE MURDEROUS RAYS, THE CASTLE OF TROUSSALET IS ON FIRE, WHILE IN THE FRENZIED SKIES A GARGANTUAN STORM IS RAGING...

AND SUDDENLY, COMING THROUGH THIS WALL OF FLAMES, MORTIMER CATCHES SIGHT OF A DS19 RACING ALONG THE ROAD LEADING TO THE GATE, SADI'S ENORMOUS MASTIFF BOUNDING AHEAD OF IT...

THE CAR IS TAKING OLRIK AND HIS LIEUTENANTS TOWARDS THE EXIT, BUT AS ITS FLIGHT BRINGS IT TO THE BEND WHERE, FOUR DAYS EARLIER, ERNEST'S TAXI HAD SKIDDED OFF, IT FINDS ITSELF UNEXPECTEDLY FACE TO FACE WITH PRADIER'S TANKS, BLOCKING THE WAY...

A WILD TWIST OF THE WHEEL PREVENTS A COLLISION, BUT THE ROAD IS SLIPPERY, AND IT IS THE CITROËN'S TURN TO SLIDE DOWN THE GRASSY BANK...

... AND A SECOND LATER DIVE INTO THE LAKE IN A PRODIGIOUS SPRAY OF WATER!

SPLASH

61

E.P. JACOBS

WITHOUT WASTING A SECOND, BLAKE, PRADIER AND THEIR MEN HAVE SCRAMBLED TO TAKE CUSTODY OF THE CAR'S PASSENGERS, WHO ARE THRASHING ABOUT IN THE MUDDY WATER...

This Olrik, then? Is he amongst them?

No! This is most peculiar!

Come on, hands up... this way!

Hello! Blake!!!

Good Lord!! But it's Mortimer!

What? Mortimer!?

IT IS IN FACT MORTIMER, FLANKED BY GOOD MAN ERNEST—RECOVERED FROM HIS FAINTING FIT—WHO HAS JUST CALLED OUT TO THEM FROM THE ROAD...

IN A FEW QUICK STEPS, BLAKE HAS JOINED HIS FRIEND. BUT THE PROFESSOR DOESN'T GIVE HIM TIME TO SPEAK.

Philip, old chap, what's happened to...

There! See that dog? I think I know what he's looking for... Quick, let's follow him! I'll explain later!

?

INDEED, AFTER HAVING FEVERISHLY PACED THE LAKE'S BANK, EBLIS, SADI'S MASTIFF, SUDDENLY BOUNDS TOWARDS THE GRATE, BARKING.

IN SECONDS, EVERYONE IS BACK ONBOARD THE TANKS WHICH, TURNING BACK, SPEED UP AFTER EBLIS... THE TRIP IS SHORT, FOR THE DOG, FOLLOWING HIS NOSE, HAS GONE DIRECTLY TO A SPOT MORTIMER KNOWS WELL: THE EXIT OF THE LAKE'S DRAIN-OFF, THROUGH WHICH THE PROFESSOR HAD LEFT THE PARK OF TROUSSALET ON THE NIGHT OF HIS ARRIVAL...

I knew it!

WOOF... WOOF!

JUST IN TIME! FIVE SECONDS LATER, OLRIK'S SCOWLING FACE EMERGES FROM THE TUNNEL...

Good evening, Colonel! A pleasure to see you again! This way, please... Allow me to introduce the welcoming committee.

!

RECOGNISING THAT RESISTANCE WOULD BE FUTILE, THE OUTLAW HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO OBEY. BUT EVEN AS HE DRAGS HIMSELF OUT OF THE WATER, HE GROWLS...

Too late, Professor! In a few minutes, they will be here! Nothing will stop them! The mission is a success!

Wrong, old fellow! Look!

INDEED, WITH ALL THE CURSED ENERGY OF 001, THE FORMIDABLE PILOT-STATION OF THE "CIRRUS" NETWORK, EXPANDED AT LAST, THE ARTIFICIAL WINDSTORM—CREATED BY THE GIGANTIC THERMAL LIFT CAUSED BY THE ACCUMULATOR'S RELEASE—HAS SWEPT THE SKIES CLEAN. AND ALREADY IN THE FINALLY PRISTINE SKY, COUNTLESS SQUADRONS ROAR BY ON THEIR WAY TO MEET THE ENEMY!!!

CHEMIN DE LA GENESTE

Failed, your little surprise attack!

Yes, your friends might as well go back home, nice and quiet!

Unfortunately, you, Colonel, will not be able to do the same!

That's enough! Keep your pleasantries, and may the Devil take you all!

A FEW DAYS LATER...

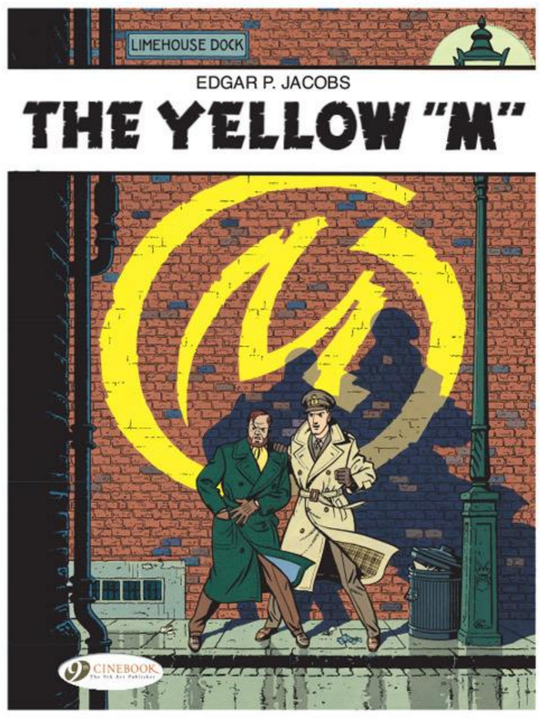
... Public fervour is incredible... It's like being back to the heady days of the Liberation! Greeted by the wild cheers of the crowd gathered on the Champs-Elysées, escorted by police motorcyclists, here comes the long black car that is taking to the Elysée Palace the three heroes of this extraordinary adventure...

... we just lived: Commissioner Pradier, Professor Mortimer and Captain Blake! And suddenly, spontaneously pouring forth from thousands of throats, like a stirring homage to the brave saviours of peace and humanity, a prodigious "Marseillaise" is rising. Allons enfants de la patrie!

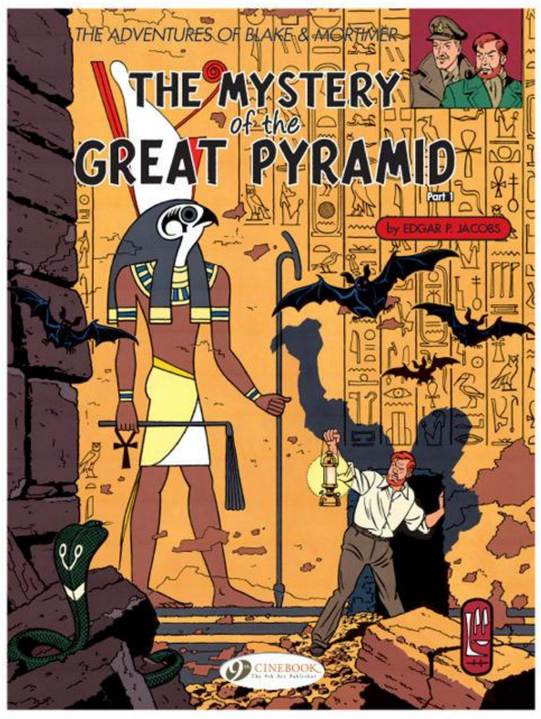
THE END

E. P. JACOBS

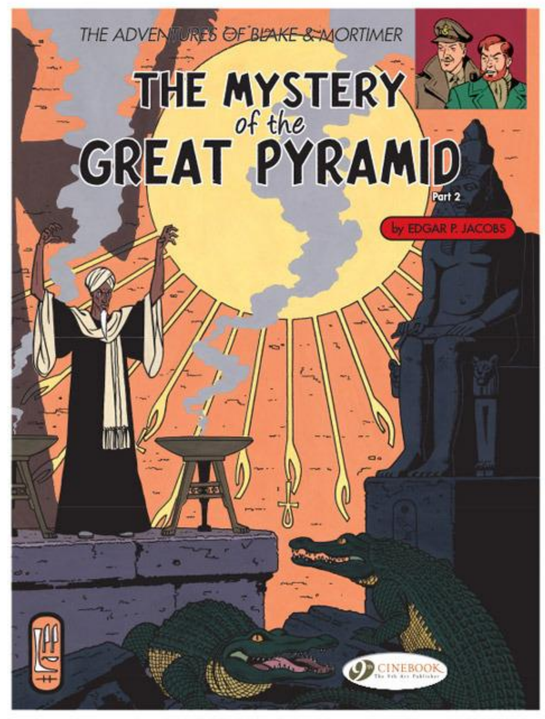
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



❶The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



❷The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



❸The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
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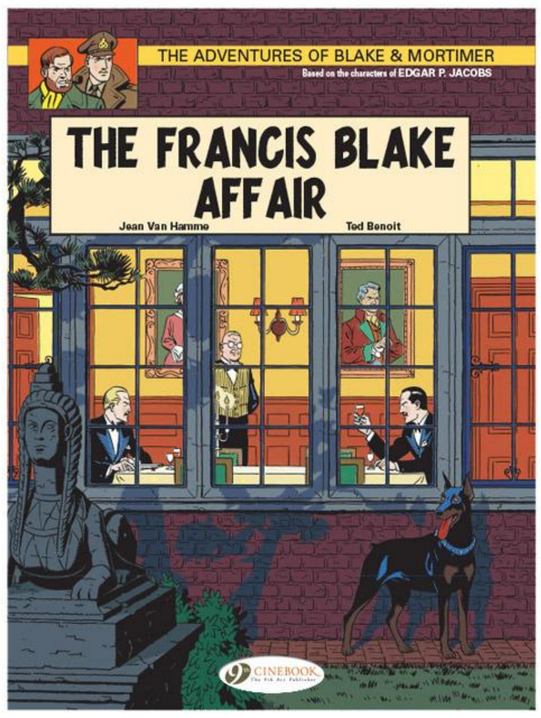
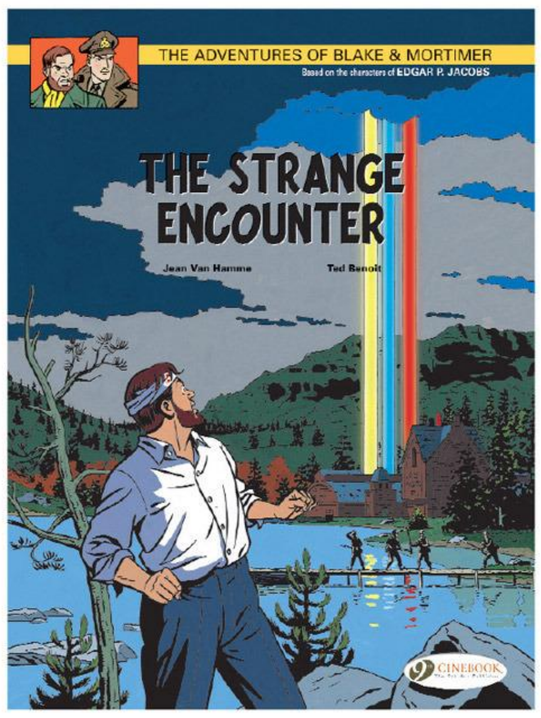
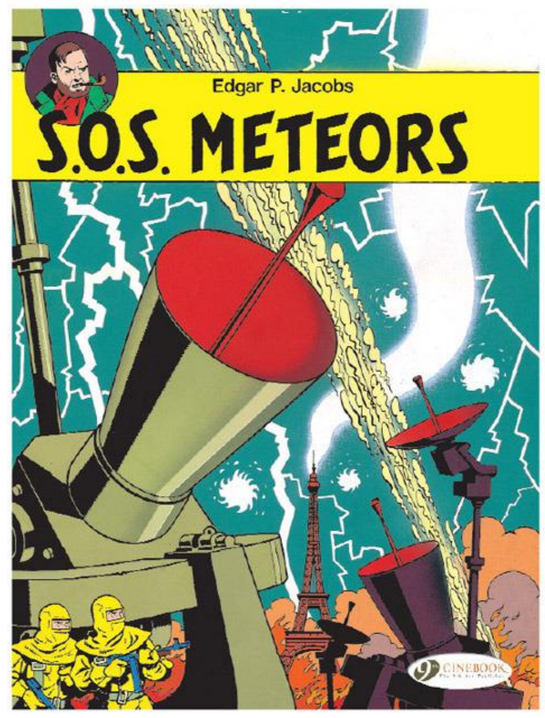


❹The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



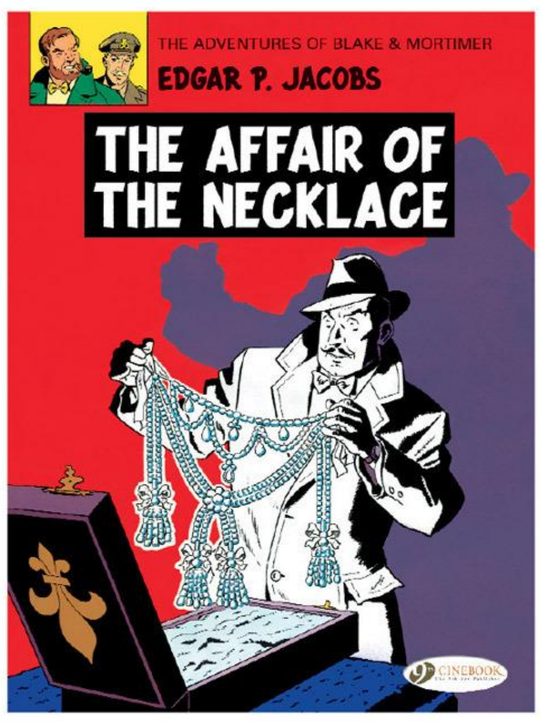
❺The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



❻S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS

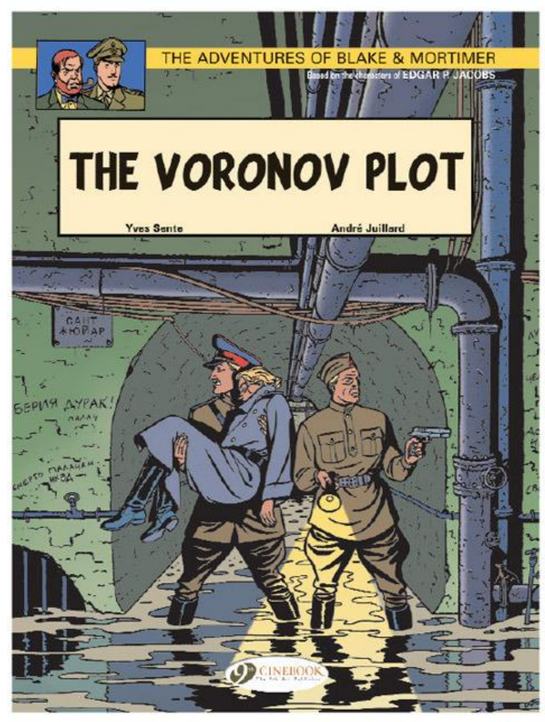
COMING SOON

JANUARY 2010



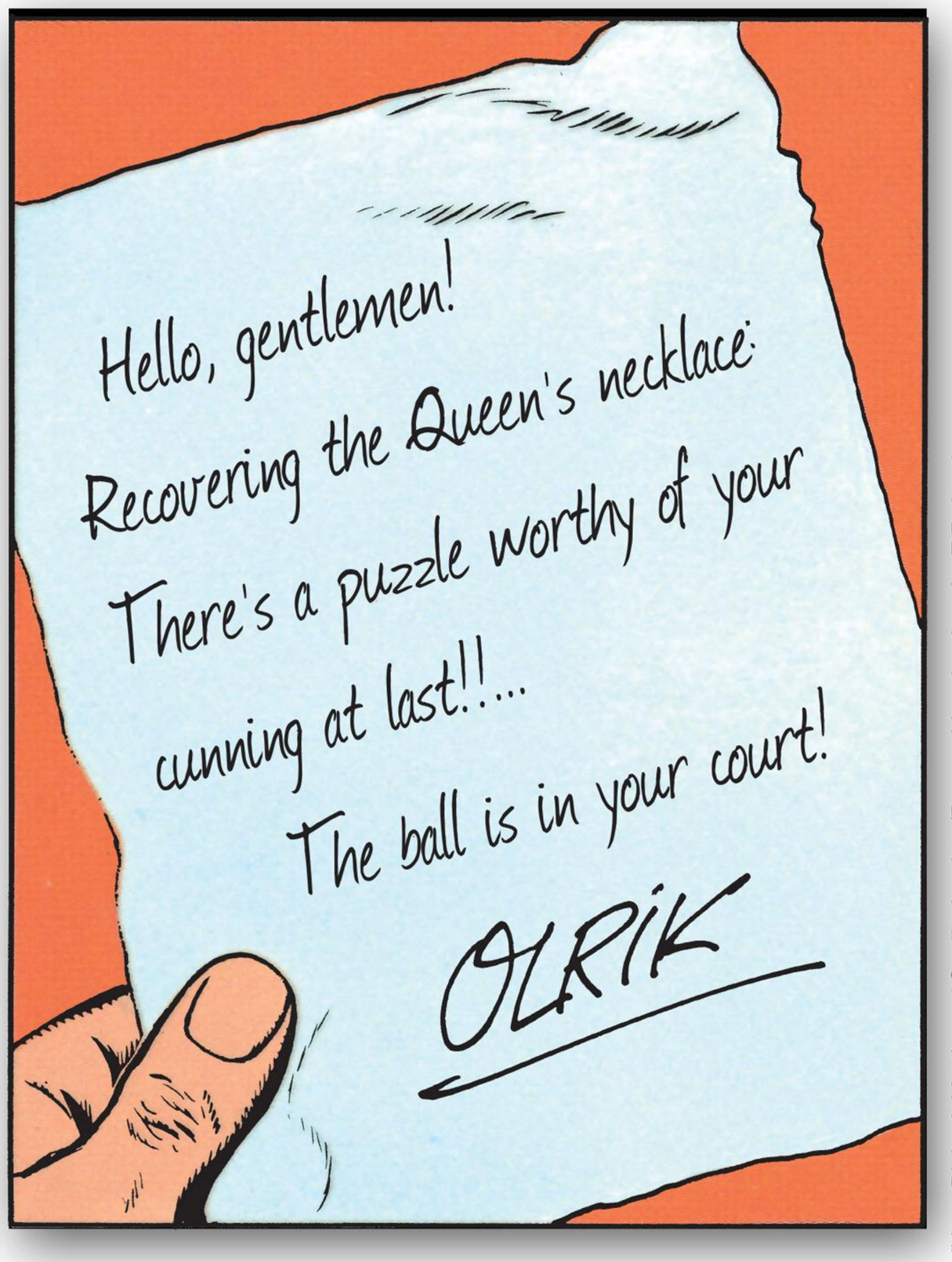
❼The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS

SEPTEMBER 2010



❽The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD

WHEN A RARE NECKLACE IS STOLEN,
BLAKE AND MORTIMER INTERVENE
TO PREVENT A DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT.



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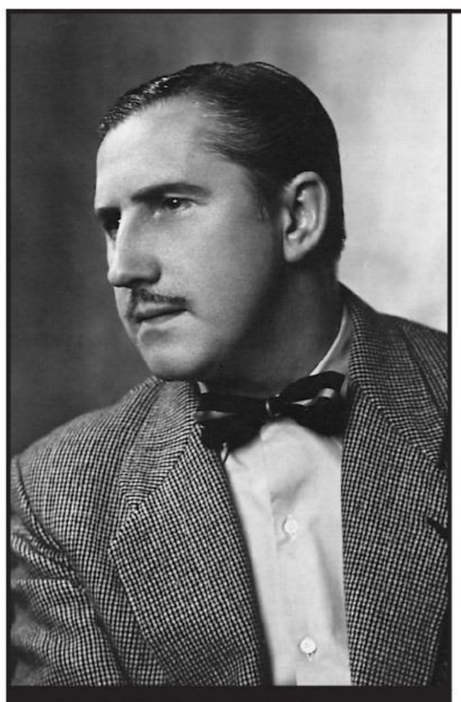

EDGAR P. JACOBS - 1946

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE

JANUARY 2010

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

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The 9th Art Publisher

THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE

9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

Erm! I'm more of the idea that he's hidden somewhere across the street, spying on our every move and thumbing his nose at us...

We'll see who has the last laugh!

RRRRING RRRRING RRRRING

Hello! Yes... Harry Adams...? Our friendly cultural attaché... How do you do?

Well, I'm calling you on behalf of Sir Williamson. He would be quite happy if you and the captain were to attend the reception he is giving tomorrow night at 9.00 at the residence of jeweller Duranton-Claret, at the end of which he will present the Queen's necklace... A car from the embassy will pick you up...

That's agreed, then... Please thank Sir Williamson for his kind invitation. He can count on our presence... Good night...

Pardon me, my dear Francis, for accepting this request in our names without consulting you. But I'm sure you will approve... Sir Williamson does us the honour of inviting us to the presentation of the famous Queen's necklace!

Ha! Ha! I didn't know a man of science could have any interest in such frivolous matters! But why not? There's another reason for us to remain in Paris!

THE NEXT EVENING, AN ENDLESS LINE OF CARS FILES BEFORE THE FAMOUS PARISIAN JEWELLER'S TOWN HOUSE, BRINGING GUESTS... AMONG THOSE, OUR FRIENDS BLAKE AND MORTIMER...

Some cars...Talk about a reception!

Blimey! Anyone who's anyone is here...

Think of what they're gonna stuff down their gullets!

Look! It's an embassy car...

Hey! But that's Professor Mortimer and the very distinguished Captain Blake!

Goodness! So many policemen! Are they worried about a hold-up!?

I doubt it! According to the newspapers, the necklace is locked up inside a theft-proof safe room...

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, THE TWO MEN STEP INTO THE OPULENT, BRIGHTLY LIT CHAMBERS WHERE A STYLISH CROWD IS MILLING TOGETHER...

I say, rather grand, Mr Duranton's residence, isn't it?

Well, we're not talking about just anybody!

...But here comes our cultural attaché!

Hello, Adams!

Hello! Do come this way. I'll introduce you to Sir Williamson...

A pleasure to meet you at last, gentlemen!

The feeling is mutual, Sir Henry...

And this is my friend, Mr Duranton-Claret, who so pleasantly restored Marie-Antoinette's necklace!

Delighted!... and our congratulations!

They say your restoration is quite the masterpiece.

Gentlemen, please!

BUT SOMEONE HAS CAUGHT SIGHT OF OUR FRIENDS. AND THIS SOMEONE, MADE UNRECOGNISABLE BY HIS LIVERY, IS NONE OTHER THAN **SHARKEY**, OLRIK'S FORMER LIEUTENANT, WHO, LUCKIER THAN THE COLONEL, MANAGED TO ESCAPE UNSCATHED FROM THE DISASTER AT **TROUSSALET**.(1)

Ha! Ha! There they are! So the "Boss" really was right when he said "they" would surely come to the reception. What a guy!

Better watch it! This isn't the time to be made!

So, you are now the happy owner of that famous treasure that was believed lost and broken up since the 18th century...

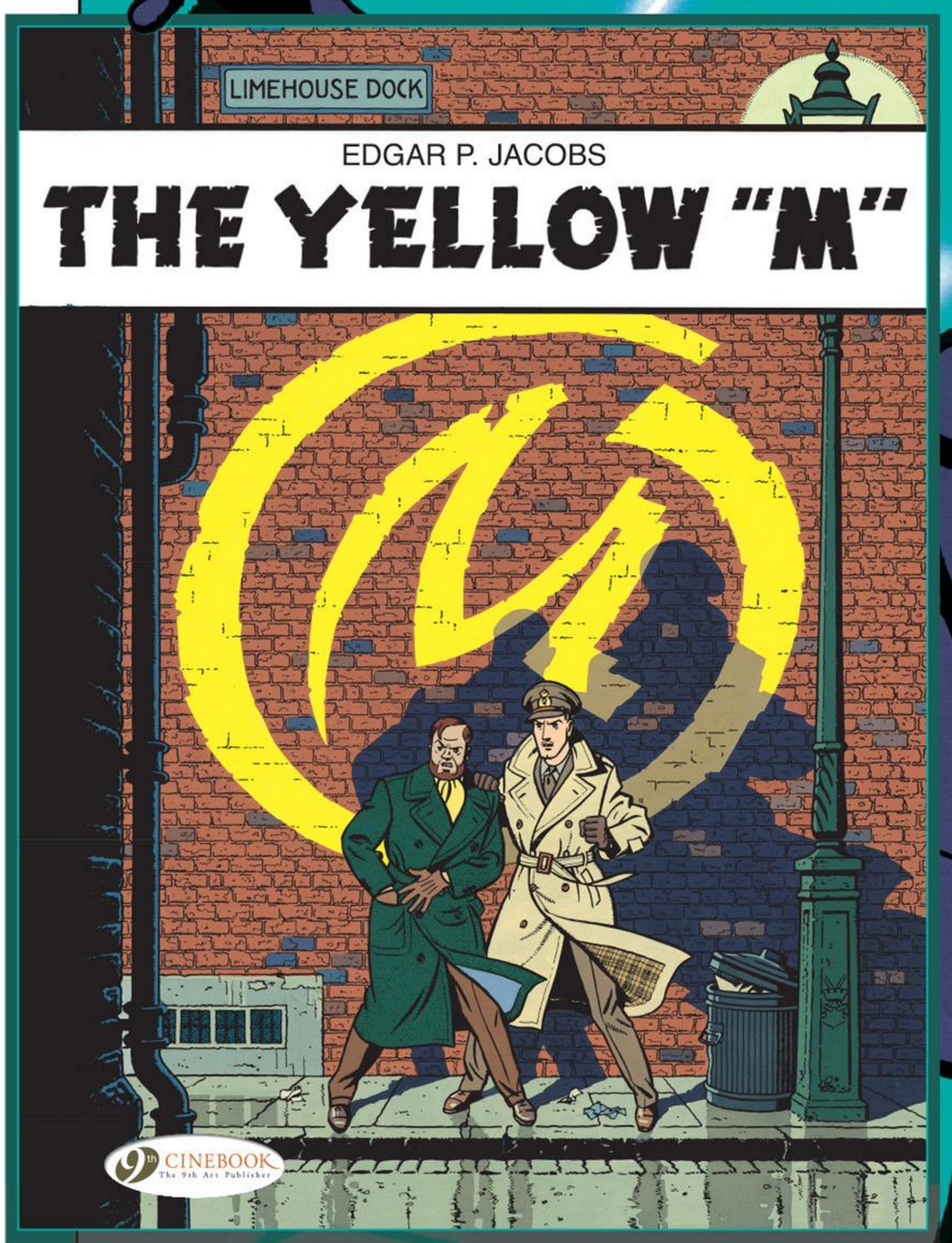
That's right: Every historian thought so! Actually, I intend to write a book about my discovery... a real novel.

... But please excuse me, gentlemen... I think it is time to share with all our guests the wonder that Duranton and I alone have known until now...

5 E.P. JACOBS

(1) SEE SOS METEORS.

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE



THE YELLOW “M”

London’s walls resound with the incredible exploits of the “Yellow Mark.” The spectacular actions of this mysterious criminal are on the increase: holding up the Bank of England, robbing the imperial crown... No one seems able to stop him. He is so audacious that he lets the police know in advance where he will commit his crimes, each time ridiculing Scotland Yard a little more.

The apparent ease with which he evades police schemes begins to worry the highest authorities of the country.

The Home Office asks Captain Francis Blake to solve the mystery and discover the identity of the man who hides behind the Yellow Mark. The captain immediately takes as partner his old friend, Professor Philip Mortimer, whose scientific knowledge will be invaluable in solving this extremely complex enigma. Who hides behind the Yellow Mark?

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A PURSUIT OF THE INTRUDER IS ORGANISED AT ONCE.

Too late! He must have gotten away by St. Thomas's Tower.

A SEARCH HAS BECOME DIFFICULT OWING TO THE DARKNESS.

Anything new?

Nothing to be seen! He's vanished into thin air.

HOWEVER, IN THE MIDST OF THE GENERAL UPROAR, THE BEEFEATER MAKES A DISCOVERY THAT CAUSES HIM TO SHOUT WITH FRIGHT.

Heavens!!

HIS SHOUT ECHOES BENEATH THE WALLS OF WAKEFIELD TOWER.

Come here!

TREMBLING, THE BEEFEATER POINTS TO THE DOOR OF THE CROWN JEWELS TOWER.

Look! The door!

It's open!

FOUR BY FOUR, THE SOLDIERS CLIMB THE STAIRS LEADING TO THE TREASURE CHAMBER...

... AND ARE STUPEFIED TO FIND THE MASSIVE STEEL PROTECTIVE DOOR AJAR.

PUSHING ASIDE THE HEAVY SHUTTERS, THE BEEFEATER RUSHES TOWARD THE WEIGHTY STEEL AND GLASS CAGE STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CHAMBER.

The Crown!...

THE GLASS IS BROKEN, AND AT THE TOP OF THE PYRAMID FORMED BY THE ROYAL JEWELS, WHERE THE IMPERIAL CROWN SHOULD BE, THERE IS AN EMPTY SPACE.

AND SUDDENLY...

Look there!

A SOLDIER POINTS TO THE FATEFUL SIGN INSOLENTLY DISPLAYED ON THE STEEL DOOR.

Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn*/*Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls*/*Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.

Volumes published in the Blake and Mortimer series:

1. 1950 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
2. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
3. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3*: The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
4. 1954 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1*: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1 - **Cinebook N°2 - 2007**
5. 1955 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2*: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2 - **Cinebook N°3 - 2008**
6. 1956 - *La Marque Jaune*: The Yellow "M" - **Cinebook N°1 - 2007**
7. 1957 - *L'Énigme de l'Atlantide*: Atlantis Mystery
8. 1959 - *S.O.S. Météores*: S.O.S. Meteors - **Cinebook N°6 - 2009**
9. 1962 - *Le Piège diabolique*: The Time Trap
10. 1967 - *L'Affaire du Collier*: The Affair of the Necklace - **Cinebook N°7 - 2010**
11. 1971 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T1*: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1
12. 1990 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T2*: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2
13. 1996 - *L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)*: The Francis Blake Affair - **Cinebook N°4 - 2008**
14. 2000 - *La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)*: The Voronov Plot - **Cinebook N°8 - 2010**
15. 2001 - *L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)*: The Strange Encounter - **Cinebook N°5 - 2009**
16. 2003 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)*: The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
17. 2004 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)*: The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
18. 2008 - *Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)*: The Gondwana Shrine

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